Towards a Philosophy of Freedom

Fichte and Bergson

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For my father Hans Kolkman

1942-1984

Contents

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Parts of this thesis have been presented at various conferences: on Fichte and intellectual intuition at the British Society for the History of Philosophy conference at Manchester Metropolitan University (2009); on Fichte's "programme" at the 59th International Congress of Phenomenology at the University of Antwerp (2009) and at the Work in Progress meetings at the University of Warwick (2009), to be published in more comprehensive form in *Analecta Husserliana*; on the "simultaneity" of the three principles of the *Foundations* at the 7th Internationalen Fichte Gesellschaft conference at the Académie Royale des sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts in Brussells (2009), to be published in *Fichte studien*; on the nature of force in Bergson at Theory Reading Group conference at Cornell (2007); on the problem of inversion and interruption in *Creative Evolution* at the Project Bergson au Japon conference at the University of Kyoto (2007), to be published by Olms Verlag in a compendendium of the proceedings of this conference; and on the relation of Fichte and Bergson at the European Network for Contemporary French Philosophy conference at the Institute de la France in London (2008). Parts of Chapter VI are published in *After the Postmodern and the Postsecular*: *New Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion*. (eds. D. Whistler and A.P. Smith, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholar's Press, 2010). I have always found the discussions that ensued after conferences to be very valuable.

The entire thesis was written in Ubuntu, an open source software.

Declaration:

I hereby declare that the dissertation "Towards a Philosophy of Freedom. Fichte and Bergson", submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy, represents my own work and has not been previously submitted to this or any other institution for any degree, diploma or other qualification.

Note on References

The following key works by Kant, Fichte and Bergson are referenced in text, using the abbreviations listed below. Where possible reference to translations are also given, they follow reference to the original (e.g., "EE 437 / 22"), except for the *Critique of Pure Reason* where reference is to the 1st and / or 2nd editions (A / B). Fichte *Sämmtliche Werke* and Bergson *Œuvres* referencing has been used throughout as these editions are still much more readily available than the new critical editions. All other references appear in footnotes. All work is referenced in full at its first occassion and either in abbreviated form or in the author-date form thereafter.

Translations of work by Fichte have often been modified, with Bergson very rarely so, as he authorised many of the translations of the *Œuvres* personally. This has not always been noted in the text. All work not existing in translation has been translated by myself.

Immanuel Kant:

KrV - *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [1781/87] (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1990) edited by Raymund Schmidt, nach der ersten und zweiten Original-Ausgabe

- *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), edited and translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Woods

KU
- *Kritik der Urteilskraft* [1790] (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2001) edited by Heiner F. Klemme; 'Erste Einleitung' to KU in *Kant's gesammelte Schriften Band XX* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1942), edited by Gerhard Lehmann
- *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), edited by Paul Guyer, translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, includes the 'First Introduction'

Johann Fichte:

EE
- *Erste Einleitung* [1797] in *Sämmtliche Werke I* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1845) edited by I.H. Fichte
- *First Introduction* in J. G. Fichte *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797-1800)* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), edited and translated by Daniel Breazeale

EK
- *Erste Kapitel* [1798] in *Sämmtliche Werke I*
- *Chapter One* in *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*

GWL
- *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* [1794/95] in *Sämmtliche Werke I*
- *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* in Johann Gottlieb Fichte *The Science of Knowledge* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982), edited and translated by Peter Heath and John Lachs

RA
- *Recension des Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der vom Herrn Prof. Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementarphilosophie* [1794] in *Sämmtliche Werke I*

- *Aenesidemus* (excerpt) in George di Giovanni and Henri Stilton Harris (eds.) *Between Kant and Hegel* (New York: SUNY, 2000), translated by George di Giovanni

SS - *System der Sittenlehre* [1798] in *Sämmtliche Werke IV*

- *The System of Ethics* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), translated by Daniel Breazeale

WLnm - *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo,* Kollegnachtschrift K. Chr. Krausse [1798/99] (Hamburg: Meiner, 1982, zweite verbesserte Auflage, 1994), edited by Erich Fuchs

- *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (Wissenschaftslehre) nova methoda (1796/99)* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), translated and edited by Daniel Breazeale

ZE - *Zweite Einleitung* [1797] in *Sämmtliche Werke I*

- *Second Introduction* in *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*

Henri Bergson:

DI - *Essai sur les données immédiates de la consciences* [1889] in Henri Bergson *Œuvres* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959)

-*Time and Free Will. An Essay on the Immediate Data of Conscience* (Mineola: Dover Publication, 2001), translated by F.L. Pogson

DSMR - *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* [1932] in *Œuvres*

- *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1935), translated by R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton

EC - *L'evolution créatrice* [1907] in *Œuvres*

- *Creative Evolution* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson, Michael Vaughan and Michael Kolkman, translated by Arthur Mitchell

ES - *L'énergie spirituelle* [1919] in *Œuvres*

- *Mind-Energy (*Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson and Michael Kolkman, translated by Henry Wildon Carr

FCI - *Fichte, cours inédit* [1898] in Octave Hamelin and Henri Bergson *Fichte* (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 1988)

IM - *Introduction à la métaphysique* [1903] in *Œuvres*

- *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), edited by John Mullarkey and Michael Kolkman, translated by T.E. Hulme, after the 1st edition from 1903 with annotations of alteration in the 2nd edition.

M - *Mélanges* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972)

MM - *Matière et mémoire* [1896] in *Œuvres*

- *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone books, 1991), translated by N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer.

PM - *La pensée et le mouvant* [1934] in *Œuvres*

- *The Creative Mind* (New York: Kensington Publishing Corp., 2002), translated by Mabelle L. Andison

INTRODUCTION: AN ALTERNATIVE TO DETERMINISM

Leibniz mentions two difficulties that have disturbed man: the relation of freedom and necessity, and the continuity of matter and its separate parts.

Kierkegaard

1. Freedom and necessity

Are we free, or forever bound in chains? If, to be free, we need to be free from all outside influences, can we ever be free? If freedom means *free from,* then what would it mean to be free from all outside influences? But also, if freedom means *free to*, then how could we be free to do anything if we must also be free from everything? What would such a freedom be worth?

We certainly feel free, we do not feel constrained, we feel we *can* decide for ourselves the actions we undertake. As Max Stirner defended most passionately: Even if you restrain my body, hack off my limbs, my spirit is free and will never be restrained.[1] But against the feeling of freedom stands the whole of science, which shows us everywhere fixed laws and effects determined by causes. In the classic formulation of Laplace:

> We may regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its past and the cause of its future. An intellect which at a certain moment would know all forces that set nature in motion, and all positions of all items of which nature is

1 Max Stirner, *The Ego and His Own* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications Inc, 1973)

> composed (...) would embrace in a single formula the movements of the greatest bodies of the universe and those of the tiniest atom; for such an intellect nothing would be uncertain and the future just like the past would be present before its eyes.[2]

Between Stirner and Laplace, between our sense of freedom and our understanding of the world, how are we to choose? If to understand the world we need to reduce states to underlying causes, but if every state then becomes a mere effect of such causes, when could freedom ever come in? The choice between necessity and freedom is a choice between a world devoid of moral responsibility and a world devoid of meaning. Between meaning and responsibility we cannot choose. For Immanuel Kant there was but one solution: the empirical, material world is determined by strict laws, but the soul and what he called the "supersensible" is free.[3] Yet this judicial solution seems merely to inscribe the relation of freedom and necessity into one where the two may never meet.

If freedom and necessity, or freedom and determinism, is a problem of reconciling our sense of freedom with our understanding of the world as found in the sciences, then haven't we recently witnessed new forms of science that do not carry the Laplacean banner? Indeed, certain contemporary strands of science attempt to model unpredictable and indeterminate processes. Would such sciences be able to account for freedom? For example, in the field of mathematical biology, what is called stochastic modelling aims to model the spread of such things as diseases and virusses. For this a

2 Laplace, Pierre Simon, *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities*, translated from the 6th French edition by Frederick Wilson Truscott and Frederick Lincoln Emory, (New York: Dover Publications, 1951 [1814]), 4.

3 See the Third Antinomy in Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft. Nach der ersten und zweiten Original-Ausgabe.*, ed. H. Klemme (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1990 [1781/87]), *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. A. Woods (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Hereafter abbreviated to KrV with A for the 1st edition and B for the 2nd edition. This reference: A 541 / B 569.

so-called "random number generator" is used. This creates a series of random numbers and combined with biological data and mathematical models a virus-spread can be neatly simulated. Although such simulations are very useful, for indeed they give us fairly accurate models of organic processes, the extent to which this leads us beyond deterministic science must be questioned. As the well-known mathematician Von Neuman once said: "Anyone who considers arithmetical methods of producing random digits is, of course, in a state of sin."[4] For indeed what *is* a randomly produced number? Mathematics itself is fundamentally incapable of conceiving, or producing such a number.[5] The purported randomness of a number simply indicates the lack of knowledge as to the formula that produces it.

This may be seen when we look at idea of chance. The word "chance" comes from the Latin *cadere*, which means "to fall". It refers to a game of dice. The way the dice fall is supposed to be merely based on chance. A fair six-sided die will give one sixth of a chance for each side. The outcome itself can not be predicted, it is claimed. But this has not at all been demonstrated. The way that the dice fall is a result of the quality of the dice, how high they are thrown, the impact on the surface, etcetera. None of these processes are in themselves random or indetermined. Dice function as a random number generator for us, but that is simply because we do not know all the relevant factors. Random modelling then does not help us reconcile science and freedom.

Another attempt to reconcile freedom and science appears as somewhat similar to the one from randomness. In Complexity Theory it is claimed that what appears to

4 Von Neuman "Various Techniques Used in Connection With Random Digits", *Applied Mathematics Series*, no. 12, 1951, 36–8.

5 Barring the use of processes that are themselves organic in nature, such as the appearance of bubbles at a surface, events the status of which is precisely what is to be determined.

be a very complex phenomenon result from what are in fact very simple, but very many simple steps. Daniel C. Dennett in his *Freedom Evolves* has attempted such a demonstration.[6] There are a relatively low number of simple opperators but because these combine a near infinite number of times the surface phenomenon is indeed very complex. Minute variations in initial conditions result in very different outcomes. This effectively reduces freedom to a mere surface phenomenon. A different attempt but with a similar outcome is found in Schopenhauer's *Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will*.[7] There too, our sense of freedom is said to be merely the mistaken result of processes that themselves are strictly determined.

Kant's judicial solution of a dual aspect theory as found in the Third Antinomy also has a modern complement. In the recent debate on *qualia* Frank Jackson proposed epi-phenomenalism as a credible philosophical position. The world itself, he claims, is as science describes it and thus strictly deterministic, but our *experience* of this world is of a wholly different nature. Not what the experience is about, but the subjective *quality* of the experience (its *qualia*) is something that cannot be reduced to the initial stimulus. Of course the attempt to stave off a domain for consciousness is admirable, yet such a dual-world theory cannot be made much sense of. Indeed, not long after having advocated epiphenomenalism Jackson recanted his initial position.[8]

6 See Daniel C. Dennett *Freedom Evolves* (New York: Viking press, 2003).
7 Arthur Schopenhauer *Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will*, translated by E.F.J. Payne, based on the 2nd edition from 1860 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
8 See Frank Jackson 'Epiphenomenal Qualia' *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 127 (April, 1982), 127-36, for the original formulation of the problem. For his later retraction see Frank Jackson, 'Postscript on "What Mary didn't know"', in *Contemporary Materialism: A Reader,* P. Moser & J. Trout (eds.) (New York: Routledge, 1995), 184-9.

2. An alternative to determinism?

Should we perhaps simply say that any attempt to save the phenomenon or sensation of freedom within a deterministic metaphysics is bound to fail? I venture the claim that determinism cannot help but reduce freedom to mere illusion or to some unexplainable epiphenomenon.[9] Determinism is simply unable to understand things otherwise than determined by and reducible to causes. Therefore, any attempt to combine a notion of freedom that is not illusory with that of a deterministic understanding of the material world is bound to fail.

Since freedom is a reality that is active in this world, a reality anyone who *acts* can attest to, we will have to delve deeper into this conflict of freedom and determinism. Could it be that determinism needs rethinking? Could it be that the understanding of the events of the world as strictly determined by underlying causes is not only wrong but *spurious*? Could it be that science does not need determinism? Could this be shown without sacrificing the *results* of science? Can this be done without falling in to a form of irrationalism? Can an alternative be formulated that is able to account for both science and a notion of real and productive freedom? These are some of the wider questions this thesis hopes to shed some light on.

For reasons of economy, a choice had to be made as to the focus of this thesis. If, in a wide sense, the thesis is concerned with the debate on determinism and freedom, there are certain things we will not be able to discuss. One very important thing we will

9 For what sense can we make of something said to be caused by natural events, but that in turn has no effect on such events? Thomas Henry Huxley is credited with the comparison of an epiphenomenon with that of the steam whistle, which contributes nothing to the locomotion of the engine. But this is both patently false (for by releasing steam it does impact on the locomotion of the engine) but even more so, it does not make of the steam a non-natural event. In an interesting case of family history, 30 years later grandson Julian Huxley tried to ridicule Bergson's metaphor of an *élan vital* by saying that, if that were so, then a train must surely be propelled by an *élan locomotive.*

not discuss is why and how determinism is unable to account for a real sense of freedom. We will offer an in-depth analys of determinism nor will we offer an immanent critique of it to show why it is unable to account for freedom. This is a weakness of the thesis that could only have been avoided if a correspondingly large section on what this alternative that I am alluding to were to be sacrificed. That determinism is unable to account for freedom is one of the principal assumptions of this thesis.

Of course there are a number of reasons that support this decision. For one, such accounts do already exist, most notably the ones offered by Henri Bergson. In *Time and Free Will, Matter and Memory* and *Creative Evolution* determinism within psychology and evolutionary theory are very effectively deconstructed. These deconstructions are clear and incisive and are not in need of repetition. Secondly, as the analysis of the different cases of Johann Fichte and Bergson will show, one can argue against quite different kinds of determinism and yet still formulate a largely similar alternative. Whereas for Bergson determinism was found mostly in various branches of the sciences, for Fichte determinism was of a *Spinozistic* kind, a then-current form of fatalism. Although Fichte criticises this form of Spinozism in *The Vocation of Man*, he had already formulated his alternative well prior to the publication of this book. In fact and as we will indicate in the next section, it is Kant that Fichte followed in this.

What the two different cases of Bergson and Fichte suggest (and to which we will add that of Kant) is that an alternative account of freedom may be formulated in relative abstraction from the position it argues against. This I have tried to develop into an independent argument. We will have to hold-off a first presentation of this argument

until Section 5 below, for we first need to clarify the idea of an alternative to determinism.

3. Kant and the spontaneity of consciousness

A key term in the alternative to determinism that I will attempt to formulate is *spontaneity*. Although Kant was most certainly not the first to have noticed the importance of this term, he was the first to posit it as the prime transcendental condition of all experience. Yet Kant's opponent cannot strictly be said to be determinism and he did not set out to demonstrate the reality of freedom in the world. Rather, his problem was of epistemological nature: how can we demonstrate that there is sure and certain knowledge? How do we show that knowledge has a necessary structure and is informed by experience? That is, how are synthetic *a priori* judgments possible? We know Kant's solution to this question: we need to distinguish between the raw and "blind" data that comes to us from the senses, what he called "empirical intuitions", and the work that is effected on this data, which concerns the concepts and categories of the understanding. It is the correct combination of empirical intuitions and the concepts of the understanding that first gives knowledge and it is only this "synthetic" knowledge that we may claim to know.

We cannot claim knowledge of the world as it is in itself, or more precisely, we cannot claim any knowledge of the world as it is *outside of its relation to us*. We only know that which is given to our *human,* that is, limited and discursive, form of understanding. But this negative answer contains a profoundly positive one. Kant saw

that knowledge is not impressed on us by nature but is always already of our making. Hence knowledge must be understood as the result of a process of self-legislation. Knowledge has a structure and it is we who give it this structure. We may therefore attempt to determine this structure. This critique of knowledge will allow us to separate reliable claims to knowledge from those that are not. Reliable knowledge-claims consist of the correct application of the categories of the understanding to empirical intuitions. Such correct application is a form of judgment. To understand how judgment is possible Kant then appeals to the *spontaneity* of consciousness.

As Robert Pippin in his article "Kant on the Spontaneity of Mind" notes, not only is "so much in the enterprise of each [of Kant's three *Critiques*] tied to the notion of spontaneity" but it was "by far the most important Kantian notion picked up and greatly expanded by later German Idealists".[10] Both what this notion means for Kant and how this was taken up by people such as Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, Pippin laments, has so far received very little attention.[11] This, he claims, has been as detrimental to Kant studies as it has been to the study of German Idealism. Pippin writes:

> [W]hen Hegel remarks in his *Differenzschrift* "That the world is the product of the freedom of intelligence, is the determinate and express principle of idealism", his remark can seem, as it has to so many in the twentieth century, like an anachronistic and quite distorted application of only a vaguely Kantian idea (the spontaneity of thinking). Part of what I want to begin to show is that the application is not distorted, and that the idea is genuinely Kantian.[12]

10 Robert Pippin "Kant on the Spontaneity of Mind." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 17:2 (1987), 474 and 451 resp. See also the interesting new work on spontaneity by Marco Sgarbi, e.g., "Spontaneity from Leibniz to Kant. Sources and studies," in *Einheit in der Vielheit: XII. Internationaler Leibniz-Kongress*, ed. Herbert Berger and Jürgen Herbst (Hannover: Leibniz Gesellschaft, 2006); "The spontaneity of mind in Kant's Transcendental Logic," *Fenomenologia e società* XXXII, no. 2 (2009): 19-28.

11 Pippin *op. cit.*, 449 and 452 resp.

12 *Op. cit.* 452.

Pippin was one of the first to stress the importance of the notion of spontaneity for Kant and the application this idea finds in Hegel, and he shows very instructively how this takes place. But what is more interesting to us is that the quote shows just how important Fichte is for this development. When Hegel writes that the world is the *product* of the *freedom* of intelligence and when Pippin equates this with Kant's idea of the spontaneity of thinking it is Fichte who is the missing link.[13] Hegel's *Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie* (1801) was his first attempt to position himself in relation to both Fichte, dominating the philosophical arena, and a still very young and very Fichtean Schelling. The "world as product of freedom" is a *Fichtean* modification of Kant; Kant himself certainly never publicly spoke of the world as product of freedom.

One of the things I want to show in this thesis is how the Fichte of the Jena-period (1794-1799) takes up the Kantian notion of spontaneity. And of course I will want to show that this is not a distorted application of this notion, but equally that the notion itself is not vague. Furthermore I will show how Bergson, standing as it were at the far end of post-Kantianism (or neo-Kantianism as it was the case in his days), takes up in a modified form this idea when he speaks of "duration". What separates Fichte from Bergson is that stormy development that is the 19th Century. So much happens during this century that we have to be careful not to assimilate philosophical notions

13 Pippin does discuss Fichte in Chapter III 'Fichte's Contribution' to his *Hegel's Idealism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 42-59. The reading relies heavily on both Hegel and Henrich and although containing a few interesting comments, is not very useful to our discussion. E.g., although he says he is not following Henrich's reading of self-positing as self-identification (p. 49), he later makes exactly this point when talking about the "I=I" (p. 54). In this thesis I give an alternative account of the argument from the Foundations. The "I=I" is shown not to concern self-identification, but to be part of a heuristic argument by Fichte intent to bring to us to understand self-positing. Pippin does not adequately grasp how self-positing has an internal relation to opposition and reciprocal determination. Hence he falsely concludes that Fichte has no account of the "co-originality" of identity and difference (p. 55). This thesis aims to show that, when not limiting oneself to Hegelian terms, such an account can most certainly be located.

too readily, and we will discuss this briefly in the *Intermezzo* between the two parts of this thesis. Yet when Bergson speaks of duration it shares a number of fundamental qualities with Fichte's use of spontaneity as "self-positing". Although Bergson considered himself an anti-Kantian, the question whether this includes a Fichtean Kantianism is one to be determined.[14]

4. Spontaneity as first principle

What is the importance of Kant's appeal to spontaneity and how does this relate to the project of elaborating an alternative account of freedom? Without delving too deeply into Kant scholarship, which ultimately is not the subject of this thesis, we need to ask why Kant appeals to spontaneity in what is the key-stone to the first *Critique,* i.e., the Transcendental Deduction. As Pippin notes, we do not find any independent discussion of spontaneity in the *Critique* itself.[15] The reason will thus have to be sought in the overall ambition of the project. Although Kant did not argue directly against any form of determinism, one of his two opponents was a radical form of empiricism (the other being what he called dogmatism, see KrV Preface A). As the failure of the empiricist project had demonstrated, the conditions for the possibility of knowledge cannot be found in the mere interaction of things alone but an essential contribution by

14 In a private meeting with Isaac Benrubi Bergson remembers how as a young man he wanted to "react energetically against the then reigning Kantianism". See Isaac Benrubi "Souvenirs personnels d'un entretien avec Bergson" in *Henri Bergson. Essais et témoignages recueillis* (Neuchatel: Éditions de la Baconnière) Albert Béguin and Pierre Thévenaz, eds., 368-9. And in another private meeting related in that same collection Bergson tells Jean de la Harpe that his friends at the École Normale used to call him "*l'anti-kantien*", see Jean de la Harpe "Souvenirs Personnels" in *op. cit.,* 359

15 Pippin, *op. cit,* 452.

consciousness must be assumed.[16] It is the impossibility of a radical empiricist project that provides the implicit argument for a spontaneous, that is, self-active contribution by consciousness. The problem of synthesising or unifying two heterogeneous elements is the problem of how to subsume particulars under universals, the problem that lead Hume to claim that all we have is habit and custom. As Kant later explained in §77 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* there is more than one way in which concepts may be applied to the sensible manifold.[17] This is due to the inherently discursive nature of the human intellect (*intellectus ectypus*). Such subsumption can never occur mechanically but requires judgment. It is this which led Kant to presuppose an original synthesis as an act of the spontaneity of consciousness.

Judgment is a spontaneous act of consciousness. This assumption, hidden within the first *Critique*, is what, in my mind at least, constitutes the true Copernican Revolution.[18] For Fichte and most people in his day it meant that freedom was now at work in the very heart of philosophy. For what else but freedom could allow for such a self-caused *(selbsttätiges)* act? Although it was Kant who first posited "the original-synthetic unity of apperception" he did not publicly reflect on the implications of such an assumption. He did not reflect on the possibility-conditions of the prime condition itself. The first person to put this question squarely on the agenda was Karl Leonhard Reinhold. Reinhold was the first to raise the question of the *grounding* of transcendental

16 As Ralph C.S. Walker notes, crucial to transcendental arguments is to show that all experience requires synthesis (KrV A77 / B103): "[Kant] argues also that even where judgment is not involved, in the most elementary kind of concept-application and in pre-conceptual awareness, synthesis is still required and must be category-governed (B 161)." See "Kant and Transcendental Arguments", in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant.* Paul Guyer (ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 244.

17 *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2001 [1790]) edited by Heiner F. Klemme; translation: *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), hereafter abbreviated to KU.

18 See e.g., KrV A 126 where Kant equates the understanding with spontaneity of cognition, a faculty for thinking, a faculty for concepts, a faculty for judgments and, finally, a faculty for rules.

philosophy and this we will discuss in Chapter I, Section 1.2. He asked, what is the first principle of transcendental philosophy? In its demand for a foundation Reinhold's philosophy might appear to us as a return to a form of philosophy made obsolete by precisely Kant himself. Whether or not this is so, the implications insofar as they concern Fichte and German Idealism were profound. For Fichte the demand for a ground for philosophy will result in making the question of philosophy *itself* an intrinsic part of philosophical reflection.[19] We need to reflect on what philosophy is in order even to *do* philosophy.

The importance of spontaneity as first principle for an alternative account of freedom lies in how spontaneity is now understood as something neither radical empiricism nor determinism can explain and yet something we have to assume in order even to imagine the very possibility of experience. That is, for Fichte and for Kant, determinism itself must appeal to the spontaneity of experience. The interpretation of Fichte that I will develop in this thesis aims to show how Fichte, under the influence of Reinhold's demand for a first principle, will attempt to formulate a philosophy of freedom. The spontaneous activity of thinking, understood by Fichte as a "self-positing I", will be explicitly presented as an alternative to determinism.

19 See *Zweite Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre,* in *Sämmtliche Werke I* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1845); translation in Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797-1800)*, trans. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1994). Hereafter abbreviated to ZE. Here: ZE 454, 513 / 37, 98. See also Bernard Bourgeois, *L'idéalisme de Fichte* (Paris: Vrin, 1995 [1966]), 1-2; Reinhard Lauth, *Die Entstehung von Schellings Identitätsphilosophie in der Auseinandersetzung mit Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre* (München: K.A. Freiburg Verlag, 1975), 38- 41; Alexis Philonenko, "Une lecture fichtéenne du cartésianisme n'est-elle pas nécessaire?," in *Le transcendantal et la pensée moderne* (Paris: P.U.F, 1990), 30-46

5. A superior principle

The reflection on the nature of first principles and the task a true alternative must set for itself will have a number of interesting consequences. How exactly this works we will discuss in Chapter I, Section 4. To pre-empt some of its results, what we will come to see is that spontaneity or freedom as an alternative principle will aim to demonstrate, not so much the *fallacy* of determinism, but the *superiority* of "freedom". What a philosophy of freedom will attempt to show is how, starting with this as first principle, we will not only be able to account for freedom as reality, but it will also let us understand the phenomena that determinism lays claim to (albeit in modified form). In attempting to account for both freedom and the reality of the phenomena that determinism claims it will be able to demonstrate *more* than determinism. This means that the debate between freedom and determinism shifts radically. No longer is it a choice or opposition between a world of value and a world of meaning, but we must attempt to demonstrate that that which determinism claims as its domain may be accounted for within "freedom".

The aim of this thesis in light of such a philosophy of freedom has a programmatic function. That is to say, it attempts first and foremost to attain clarity as to the conditions under which the problem of freedom and determinism may be solved. Although it does not claim to solve the problem, it does take the position that once we know the conditions under which both parties may agree to a solution, that then a solution becomes all the more realistic. Because it aims to clarify a problem, rather than proceed directly to a solution, the problem itself can only be presented as the argument unfolds. Here in the Introduction we will give a first outline but the reader should bear

in mind that we will constantly return to this outline to develop it further.

A philosophy of freedom will have to be able to give an account of the reality of the material world. That this is a task for freedom first became apparent when Jacobi questioned the intelligibility of a thing that is said to exist but of which we can never claim any knowledge, i.e., the thing in itself. We will discuss the problems this raises in Ch. I, Sect. 1.1 and Fichte's programmatic solution to it in Ch. I, Sect. 4. The question of the thing in itself will necessitate a further reflection on two very important issues. The first is a reflection on Kant's transcendental distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal, the second a reflection on materiality and (with Bergson) individuation.

Kant's reference to a thing in itself could lead people to think that he was merely rewriting Plato's allegory of the cave. Our knowledge concerns only mere phenomena of a true world that now is forever beyond our grasp. Clearly this is not the case but Kant's use of the term phenomena to describe knowledge, or the *Anschauungen* that give us mere appearances (*Erscheinungen*) created plenty of confusion. One of the things that Fichte wants to make much more clear is how the phenomenal-noumenal and the transcendental-empirical distinctions should be understood.

These issues tie in with Reinhold's demand for an explication of the ground of transcendental philosophy. A widely shared belief in the very first reception of Kant's philosophy was that Kant had done well to show what the conditions of experience had to be for there to be experience, but he had failed to demonstrated *that* this was the case. As G.E. Schulze wrote, was it not a case of *petitio principii* to posit a *Vermögen* of synthetic unity of apperception in order to explain the *Möglichkeit* of the unity of experience? Should one not also *prove* such unity? (See Ch. I, Sect. 1.3) The questions

as to the ground of philosophy, of a proof of philosophy and an explication of the status of the thing in itself thus interlock.

The thing in itself equally asks after materiality and individuation. The thing in itself was crucial to Kant's critical distinction between the world as it is outside of any relation to the understanding and our experience of a world that is always already determined by the proper limits of the understanding. This allowed Kant, on the one hand, to agree with the skeptical critique of the dogmatic claim to immediate knowledge and, on the other hand, and contra skepticism, to demonstrate the possibility of a legitimate claim to knowledge. To maintain this distinction Kant had to demonstrate that the subject does not have any immediate access to the object (contra dogmatism), without falling into a form of radical or material idealism that denies any knowledge of the world whatsoever. How precisely Kant saw this was not immediately apparent to his contemporaries and indeed well over two centuries later we still often struggle to understand it.

Fichte's solution will be to demonstrate that the (empirical) subject only ever appears with the (empirical) object in a genetic progress he called "reciprocal determination" (*Wechselbestimmung,* GWL 131 / 127[20]). The *empirical* distinction between a subject of knowledge and an object of knowledge should not be transposed into a transcendental distinction between a subject and an unknown object existing independently of each other. This principle of reciprocal determination is equally a principle of division because it involves an originary division of subject and object. As such the principle of reciprocal determination is a principle of the continuity of matter

20 Johann Gottlieb Fichte *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* [1794/95] in *Sämmtliche Werke I,* translation in *idem The Science of Knowledge* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982), edited and translated by Peter Heath and John Lachs. Abbr. to GWL.

and its separate parts. This will be discussed a number of times in the thesis (most notably at Ch. I, Sect. 3; Ch. II, Sect. 4&5, Ch. III, Sect. 5). It is especially on the issue of materiality that a juxtaposition with Bergson becomes particularly instructive.

6. Bergson and the continuity of matter and its separate parts

Throughout Bergson's *Œuvres* we find two main principles whose combination allows him to explain experience. These two principles, duration and space, are two forms of organisation, or processes if you will, that combine in varying degrees. Bergson attempted to explain why what we may call a mind-body or spirit-matter split arises, and to show how all life is always already composed of "mind-body" or "spirit-matter", but composed in varying *degrees* or *nuances.*[21] As the analysis in this thesis aims to demonstrate duration, as a principle of life, has certain qualities that make it operate in a similar vein to Fichte's appeal to spontaneity. Indeed, for Bergson the creative effort of life is spontaneous. We may, for instance, say that duration is "simple" rather than complex, yet allowing for differentiation, in the words of Jankélevitch "*plutôt indivisible que indivise*", indivisible rather than undivided.[22] Hence it may be compared to Fichte's principle of the *Tathandlung* that is a synthesis that is said to *precede and allow for* thesis and antithesis. Duration is continuous rather than discrete, comparable again to Fichte's absolute I that, unlike the opposable limited I and limited not-I, knows no lack and no limitation. And it is active or even productive (certain cautions will have to be

21 Gilles Deleuze speaks of this notion of the nuance as being the essence of psychical life. See his early "Bergson's Conception of Difference," in *The New Bergson*, ed. John Mullarkey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 46.
22 Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Henri Bergson* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 40.

made concerning "production"), in that it concerns *real change* in the world, comparable to the *Tathandlung* as "performative action".[23] Bergson introduces the notion of duration somewhat hesitantly at first, but as his thought develops, all of life is progressively seen as durational, something that continuously "makes itself". Fichte spoke of *Selbstsetzung* or "self-positing", something that erects itself, sustains itself, something we may very well say with Bergson concerns the *se faisant*, the "making of itself". These similarities first struck me when, in Fichte's *Review of Aenesidemus,* I read that consciousness is not a thing but an activity. *Not a thing, but an activity*. At the same time I read in Bergson's *Matter and Memory* that duration is a continuity *that differentiates itself* and that "things" first follow from this. Whether it be duration as “creative push” (*élan vital*) or *Tathandlung* as performative action, both concepts (at the level I want to compare them here) oppose such an active principle with something think-like and already constituted. We cannot and should not think of “that which makes” (Bergson) or the conditions of objectivity (Fichte) with the same concepts as that which is “ready-made” or already constituted.

For Bergson the living being is one that, although constantly being "unmade" by material decay, is at the same time constantly "making itself". The making and unmaking of itself must be seen as two forms of organisation, duration and space, which, for Bergson may equally be called the spiritual and the material principle. All life and all bodies are constantly being unmade, falling apart, tending towards entropy. Yet life is also ceaseless creation, a making of itself. But why is this so? If the creative effort of life occurs spontaneously, and in making itself sustains itself as organism, or as Fichte writes "posits itself", and hence is "absolute" because *not reducible* to material

23 On *Tathandlung* see Ch I, Sect. 2.1 and on its relation with duration see Ch. IV, Sect. 3.1

determinacy, then why this falling apart, why this unmaking? This problem of life's making and unmaking of itself is a problem of life's embodiment.

The relation between life and embodiment is one that will only become fully explicit with Bergson's *Creative Evolution,* but as we will see, it is prepared by the preceding analyses in *Time and Free Will* and *Matter and Memory*. Bergson will come to claim that all existence is duration and that duration is both substansive and internally differentiated. In *Matter and Memory* he will discuss how, when starting with duration as first principle (my term, not his) duration differentiates itself and that this self-differentiation is what allows us explain the phenomenon of things-like entities. Fixed things with clear outlines, self-subsistent individuals; this is something Bergson can account for as *phenomenon*. He offers an explanation of *how* things appear, but not of *why* things appear. That is, things remain a manifestation of a principle that is itself continuous, simple, and unitary. From *Matter and Memory* to *Creative Evolution* the question becomes: Why this superabundance of different forms of life that we see on our planet? Why this incessant differentiation that is evolution? If the crocodile shows us a form of life that has been adequately adapted to its environment for the last 200 million years (outliving the dinosaurs by 65 million years), then environmental pressures alone cannot account for the abundance of forms. We will need something besides passive adaptation to account for this superabundance.

7. A matter of principle (Stating the problem).

It is here that Bergson and Fichte share a fundamental problem. It is this problem that is the real focus of this thesis. To bring this problem into clear view I have had to stress a certain reading of both authors with which not everyone will be comfortable. Especially as concerns Bergson this will make him into much more of a Kantian than is sometimes liked. However, as this will allow us to understand more clearly the internal development of Bergson's thought and the precise problem that faces him when commencing work on *Creative Evolution* I hope the reader will bear with me. This problem is one of principle. Fichte states it succinctly in the *First Introduction*: either one starts with the idea that every event is fully determined by its cause, with what he calls "the thing", or we start with "consciousness", with the immediacy and spontaneity of experience (EE, 425-6 / 11).[24] When the choice is between determinism and spontaneity, the thesis chooses spontaneity.

Although a full analysis of the shortcomings of determinism falls outside the scope of this thesis a few words will have to be said. What I refer to with the umbrella term "determinism" I, in fact, take to consist of the following three dogmas. 1.) Determinism proper: Any state of affairs is always the result of its underlying and preceding causes and may be fully derived from them (See also the quote by Laplace above). The causal chain extends both back into the past and forwards into the future. As Bergson will come to say, this means that everything is given all at once. This is because the causal chain is itself determined by universal and invariable laws (which may be considered a subsidiary claim). 2.) Mechanism: Objects combine in purely

24 *Erste Einleitung* in *Sämmtliche Werke I,* transl. in *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre.* Abbr. to EE.

mechanical fashion, that is to say, they may combine and recombine without the implication of any change to the constitutive parts. This is supported by the third dogma: 3.) Atomism: There are a finite number of basic elements (and ultimately this can only be one kind of element). These elements are perfectly homogeneous, both spatially and temporally. Any higher level object consists of a complex of such simple elements. The combination of elements is mechanical and determined by universal laws. This together makes up the complex world we perceive.

For all the advancements made in the sciences, in terms of Chaos theory, Complexity theory, Relativity and Quantum mechanics, it is still very hard to break with this model of thought. Again, the aim of this project is not to reject this model out of hand but to see to what extent it may be thought alongside another model. This is necessitated by some deep problems with a purely deterministic account. An analysis of this account has already been given by others, most notably by Bergson himself. The following is only a short overview and does not claim anything more than that.

How to account for ecology? Determinism provides very little with which to think in dynamic fashion the relations between individual and society, or between species and environment. Adaptation needs to be re-conceptualised as *reciprocal* adaptation. Secondly, causality. How does one thing lead to another? Determinism must allow for the reversibility of all processes. But this is absurd in the case of living organisms that have a history. How to account for the qualitative progress that is living history? How to account for the ability of all life to learn from its past? And finally, identity. How to understand identity over time? How to understand it as a dynamic process? These issues indicate a view of life that sees it as part of the whole of life, one

that has a history and that is able to actively adapt and redefine itself. In the thesis when we speak of freedom or of spontaneity it is this that we have in mind. The function of the thesis within this very complex and virtually all-encompassing debate is the following, limited one: Can we establish under which conditions both parties in the debate (the determinist and the advocate of freedom or spontaneity) can come to an agreement? What would we have to show, and how would we have to show it, if both sides are to agree on the solution? The study of Fichte and Bergson is relevant because they help us think through these issues at their most fundamental level. They are two philosophers, and quite different at that, that have really attempted to think *relationally*. They both start with the *whole of experience* to then see how relations appear and how identities appear from within relations. If we keep this is mind then we should be able to look past their very real differences, to see where they are complementary and comparable. I will now give first programmatic outline of how Fichte and Bergson help us mediate the debate between determinism and freedom. It will be taken up again in more detail in Chapter I, Section 4.

As I stated at the beginning of this Introduction, this thesis attempts to formulate an alternative to purely deterministic account. It thus makes a clear choice for freedom as something that can never be reduced to strict determinism. But if some progress is to be made in this tenacious debate it cannot simply be down to a choice. If the alternative to a deterministic metaphysics is a simple *choice* for the reality of freedom then what would be gained thereby? What this thesis will attempt to show is that there exists an argument that will allow us to remove the opposition of freedom and determinism. This

argument consists in the attempt derive determinism from freedom, or, in the language of Fichte's *First Introduction,* to derive "the thing" from consciousness.

When we claim to derive "the thing" from consciousness great care should be made to understand such consciousness properly, if only because Fichte has often been understood to have developed a solipsistic or "world-creative" kind of idealism. This I do not believe is the case and this should be born out by the analysis as presented in this thesis. What Fichte (and in modified form Bergson) aimed to show was *how,* if we start with an original and spontaneous act of synthesis as prime transcendental condition, this may then be seen to result in an empirical subject and an empirical object. In this sense the "thing" will have to be derived from "consciousness". But Fichte wanted to do more than that. It does not suffice to posit spontaneous synthesis as condition of experience because then one could be accused of question-begging. This we will discuss in the first part of Chapter I. It makes clear that we need to demonstrate *that* this is case. How now to do this?

What the critique of question-begging brings out is that, if transcendental philosophy, in positing spontaneity aims to resolve a problem that determinism cannot (how is experience possible?), merely positing spontaneity will not do. One could be accused of a form of idealism that only gives us appearances and never reality, only illusions and never knowledge. If determinism claims that the things we see are really as they are and that they determine experience and thus that something like consciousness is an unnecessary assumption, and we now inversely claim that spontaneity of consciousness must be assumed but that the things as we see them are mere manifestations, then would we not have simply *inverted* our opponent's position?

What we must show is not the mere *appearance* of a subject-object relation, or of "things" (as in many ways Bergson was able to show in *Matter and Memory*), but we must show their *necessity*. In the terms of Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, if life is an *élan vital,* a vital impulse, if life is auto-creative and spontaneous, then what about living *beings*? Why not simply uninterrupted creation? What is the *need* for individuation and incorporation? This need must be one that is *internal to* life, only in this way can it strictly speaking be a necessity *for* life. In terms a transcendental philosophy of life, if we have shown that experience (the empirical) can only be understood on the basis of certain transcendental conditions (spontaneity of consciousness), can we now show that *what is conditioned* (the empirical) is itself a condition for *what conditions*? If we can show that part A of the argument is only possible under the assumption of part B, the necessity and hence *proof* of B consist in showing that B is only possible under the assumption of A. Only if A conditions B and B conditions A, are A and B necessary complements. Only in this way can we ward off the charge of idealism, of question-begging and of having inverted one's opponent.

This is a problem for Fichte and a problem for Bergson. Although the surrounding debates were very different they share this fundamental philosophical challenge. That the charge of idealism worried Bergson until the very end of his life may be clearly seen from a footnote he added in 1934 to the re-edition of *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, making it one of the very last things he allowed to appear in print (Bergson died in 1941). After having stated that all reality is durational Bergson adds this footnote:

> Let me insist I am thereby in no way setting aside *substances*. On the contrary, I affirm the persistence of existences. And I believe I have facilitated their representation. How was it ever possible to compare this doctrine to Heraclitus? (IM, 1420n / 38n).[25]

What worried Bergson was that people considered his philosophy a form of Heraclitianism, a form of idealistic dynamism. He worried that people thought he had only inverted determinism. Yet he felt he had *facilitated* the understanding of the persistence of existences.

Fichte is less explicit and at one point even seems to deny the very possibility of what I am about to attempt. He writes in the *First Introduction* that necessity and freedom are two different principles that can never be combined:

> Anyone who wishes to challenge this claim must establish the possibility of such a combination, a combination that presupposes a continuous transition from matter to mind or vice versa, or (what amounts to the same thing) a continuous transition from necessity to freedom (EE 431 / 16-17).

But he also writes that the "dual-series" of consciousness will allow you to understand both consciousness *and* the object of experience.

How and even *if* this will work is something that can only be judged on the basis of the thesis as a whole; this, after all, is only the introduction. If we now have some

25 *Introduction à la métaphysique* in Henri Bergson, *Œuvres* (Paris: Press Universitaires de France, 1959) this is the 1934 edition. Transl. after the 1st edition in Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, ed. J. Mullarkey and M. Kolkman, trans. T.E. Hulme (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007a). Abbr. to IM.

It was Jacques Maritain who compared Bergson to Heraclitus in his *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). This work first appeared in 1913 and was re-edited with a new Preface in 1931, hence just prior to the publication of in 1934 of *The Creative Mind* that included the subtly edited edition of IM. Maritain compares Bergson with Heraclitus on a number of occasions, see e.g., 174-5, 278. Bergson appended the footnote to *The Creative Mind* version. This makes it one of the very last things that Bergson allowed in print. The differences between the two editions are annotated in the English translation of IM mentioned above.

idea of the issues at stake in the attempt to formulate a philosophy of freedom we might ask what the textual basis is to a juxtaposition of Fichte and Bergson.

8. Bergson on Fichte

References to Kant and Zeno aside, Bergson was most certainly sparse in his references to philosophy. There is a wealth of information concerning the scientific literature Bergson consulted; indeed, Bergson is probably unparalleled in the history of philosophy for the rigour and scope of the empirical data analysed.[26] But as has been remarked more than once, there is a real lack and a need to know the *philosophical* references of his work.[27] Bergson really only mentions very few philosophers in his work and even then it is generally to characterise their work with just a line or so. Again, Kant and Zeno aside, who both significantly appear in *Time and Free Will, Matter and Memory* and *Creative Evolution* no real discussion of the work of other philosophers appears to take place. The only moment in his *Œuvres* where this does take place is in the *coup d'œuil,* the "glance" over the history of philosophy with which ends *Creative Evolution*. We do not find Fichte in this history.

Fichte in mentioned by name only three times in the *Œuvres*, twice in *Creative Evolution* (1907) and once in 'Introduction: Part II. Stating the Problems" (1922).[28] The

26 Of the 108 names that are listed in the index of names in the new critical edition of *Creative Evolution,* a rough count of philosophers came to 14. See Bergson *L'évolution créatrice*, (Paris: PUF, 2008) *Le choc Bergson,* Frédéric Worms ed. *Dossier critique* by Arnaud François.

27 See Philip Soulez's 'Presentation' to Henri Bergson, "Fichte (cours inédit)," in *Fichte*, Octave Hamelin and Henri Bergson (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 1988), hereafter abbreviated to FCI, 148, who also cites Deleuze's *Bergsonism* on this point.

28 Henri Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice,* in *Œuvres*, translation in *Creative Evolution*, ed. K. Ansell-Pearson, M. Kolkman, and M. Vaughan, trans. A. Mitchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Hereafter abbreviated to EC. See EC 656-7, 797 / 122-3, 228. An implicit reference is the example of "A=A" at EC, 729 / 177.

first time Fichte is mentioned is when Bergson opposes Fichte to Herbert Spencer, two philosophers Bergson claims he "happened to have just brought together (EC 656 / 122, also see Ch. VI of this thesis). Bergson juxtaposes Fichte and Spencer to show how two very different philosophers still make the same fundamental mistake, namely not to see "the cleft" between "the organised" and the "unorganised" (*ibid*). At first view this does not constitute much of a case to study Bergson and Fichte together. But a number of considerations support a suspicion otherwise.

For we know that, at least as concerns Spencer, it cannot be by chance that Bergson mentions him. Indeed, the young Bergson was quite the follower of Spencer.[29] Spencer advocated a form of evolutionary determinism, the very thing Bergson later sets out to destroy in *Creative Evolution*. Spencer attempted to "reconstruct evolution with fragments of the evolved" (EC 802 / 232). Spencer did not see the difference between "the ready-made individual" and that which is always *en train de se faire*, that which is in the process of making itself, hence he did not see the difference between the unorganised and the organised. Spencer attempted to reduce life to matter.

This leads to a further suspicion that it might well be a crucial junction in the argument that Fichte and Spencer are juxtaposed "haphazardly". This confrontation takes place in the opening section on "The Method in Philosophy". The third chapter is the first moment when, after the preparatory work of the two preceding chapters Bergson will attempt to show how, from the newly opened ground, matter and knowledge may be seen to co-originate (see EC 493-4 / xxxviii-ix). Bergson wants to

"Introduction (Deuxième Partie)" in *La pensée et le mouvant* in *Œuvres,* hereafter abbr. to PM. Translation: 'Introduction: Part II' in Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, trans. Andison, M.L. (New York: Citadel Press, 2002). See PM, 1290 / 48.

29 Jean de la Harpe, 1943, 358-9.

demonstrate the "dual genesis" of matter and knowledge, because only if we understand how matter and knowledge co-originate can the question of the relativity of knowledge finally be solved. This, Bergson states explicitly in *Matter and Memory*, is a Kantian problem. For Bergson it was Kant who made all knowledge relative to the human understanding, which means that reality is ultimately unknowable (see MM 320 / 184 and our discussion at Ch. V, Sect. 4).

Bergson foresaw the solution in *Matter and Memory* but he would only develop it eleven years later with *Creative Evolution*. It is to trace back the development of human understanding to its source and to the moment knowledge becomes relative to our limited and human needs (MM *loc. cit.*). Once this is done a true *genesis* of knowledge becomes possible. Hence Bergson wants to rewrite Kant's deduction, a deduction already understood as *genesis*. Kant's deduction had failed because Kant had taken the forms of thought (the categories) as something ready-made, which he then attempted to apply to an equally ready-made object (EC 668 / 131-2). But if we could show that the forms of thought co-evolved with life itself then they could be shown to be *adequate* to life. Now, as Deleuze comments in 1960, lecturing on this exact chapter, Kant too, though more implicitly than explicitly, wanted to trace the genesis of the understanding.[30] Fichte (and Deleuze also mentions Maïmon), wanted to complete the Kantian project by simultaneously tracing the genesis of matter. The "true problem of Kantianism", Deleuze says, is "in what way are receptivity and spontaneity in harmony?"[31] Hence we see clearly that Bergson inscribes himself, wittingly or

30 Gilles Deleuze, "Lecture Course on Chapter Three of Bergson's Creative Evolution.," *SubStance* Issue 114: Henri Bergson's Creative Evolution, vol. 36, no. 3 &4, 2007, 77-8.

31 *Loc. cit.* Compare also with what Bourgeois writes a few years later on Fichte: The difficulty for a philosophy that does not want to be transcendent and incomplete lies in accounting for the passivity of the subject *through* its activity. See Bourgeois 1995 [1966], 16.

unwittingly, in a *Fichtean* completion of post-Kantianism. We will discuss this in more detail in Ch. V Sect. 4 and Ch. VI Sect. 3.3.

9. Bergson's lectures on *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*

We have two strong reasons for looking much more closely at the two references to Fichte. But not only do we know that Bergson studied Spencer in great detail, we are also in possession of a lecture transcript of a course that Bergson gave on Fichte. In 1898 Bergson had been commissioned (we know little as to who initiated this) to lecture on Fichte's *The Vocation of Man.*[32] For this course Bergson greatly exceeds the requirements. *The Vocation of Man* aside, he not only mentions but discusses with acumen the following texts, most of which had not been translated:

Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre Sect. 1-4 (1794/95) (a translation existed)
Outline of the Distinctive Character of the Wissenschaftslehre (1795)
The Foundations of Natural Right (1796)
First Introduction (1797/98)
Second Introduction (1797/98)
An Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre, *Chapter I* (1797/98)
Wissenschaftslehre (1801)
Sun-Clear Report to the Public (1801)
Characteristics of the Present Age (1806)

32 See FCI. In a letter to X. Léon from 5/12/1914 Bergson writes of notes he has made when preparing for this course. Would these notes have been destroyed or could they be found in the Bergson Archives? See Henri Bergson, *Correspondances* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002).
Fichte appears a number of times in other lecture transcripts of courses given prior to this one. Fichte does not appear in any of the lecture-transcripts available to us of courses given subsequently. For a discussion of all references to Fichte in lectures, letters and publications see Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron, "Bergson et Nabert, lecteurs de Fichte," *Fichte-Studien* Bd. 13, no. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Systematik der Transzendentalphilosophie (1997b): 89-108

In the France of 1898 Fichte's popular writings were known and had been in print, but his theoretical writings had received very little independent study. In 1898, then, Bergson had little to fall back on.[33] The first mayor French work to appear on Fichte's philosophy would not appear until 1922 with Xavier Léon's *Fichte et son temps.* An earlier work had appeared in 1902 by the same author and had been sent to Bergson.[34] In a letter written that same year to thank Léon, Bergson writes:

> I had the pleasure to find, upon returning from a journey, a work, waited for very impatiently, on the philosophy of Fichte.[35]

He goes on to compliment Léon on his work and then writes:

> I was amazed by the fluency and ease with which you have transported yourself into the interior of this philosophy, - the most difficult, the most obscure for me, of all those I have had occasion to study.

33 The political ideas of Fichte were already made known to the French public during the French Revolution via a publication in the *Moniteur Universel* of 1795. The only translations available to Bergson were of *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (partial translation in 1801 and in full in 1833 by Barchou de Penhoën; Bergson refers to this translation) and of *Die Reden and die Deutschen Nation* in 1813. First lectures on Fichte by Victor Cousin, a prominent Hegelian, in 1815. Ravaisson, who was an important influence on Bergson, had studied under Cousin and also under Schelling. First extensive presentation of Fichte's philosophy by Joseph Willm in 1847 (*Histoire de la philosophie allemande depuis Kant jusqu'à Hegel*. T. II, Règne de l'idéalisme critique et transcendantal. Philosophie de Fichte, de Jacobi). Next publication on Fichte was subsequent to the lectures, in 1902 by Xavier Léon. At the start of the 20th Century Fichte was generally incorporated in French spiritualism and personalism, as a reaction to positivism. See H.J. Sandkühler (herst.), *Handbuch Deutscher Idealismus* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2005), 365-7.

In his lecture course Bergson refers to I.H. Fichte's *J. G. Fichte's Leben und literarischer Briefwechsel* (1862); to Kuno Fischer, probably his *Geschichte der neurn Philosophie* and to Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's *La philosophie de Jacobi* (1894), a reference that also appears in the original 1903 text of *An Introduction to Metaphysics.*

34 This was *La philosophie de Fichte, ses rapports avec la conscience contemporaine* (Paris: Alcan, 1902)

35 Bergson *Correspondances,* letter dated April 15th, 1902, 67-8. Fichte is mentioned in the following letters: 8/7/1901; 15/4/1902; 2/1/1909; 27/1/1914; 23/9/1924; 18/6/1927.

The most difficult, the most obscure, yet the reading that Bergson gives of Fichte may be considered a balanced and fairly accurate one;[36] all the more so for the very meagre reception of Fichte till then. In another letter to Léon, written only months after the outbreak of the First World War, Bergson speaks again of Fichte.[37] He mentions his great interest in Fichte's "Jacobinism", an aspect of Fichte of which he himself knows little. Yet he suspects that Fichte's alleged Pangermanism has non-philosophical origins. He expresses his hopes that Léon will write a book that will show the great influence the French Revolution has had on the development of German philosophy, and indeed we know that Fichte was an enthusiastic supporter of the French Revolution.[38] Then he writes:

> For it are often our own ideas, systematised and pushed to their extreme consequences, that we go and look for in Germany. I will not refrain from stating this, even though for thirty years I have been a member of a generation that was hypnotised by German thought.[39]

What could Bergson have learned from Fichte? What could he have recognised, in more *systematic* and *extreme* form, in Fichte's attempt to show the dual genesis of spontaneity and receptivity? As Philip Soulez suggested:

> The writer of *The Immediate Data of Consciousness* [= *Time and Free Will*], the philosopher of the unconscious (*Matter and Memory,* 1896) certainly had his reasons to encounter Fichte, author of *The Facts of Consciousness* and co-inventor

36 According to J.-C. Goddard. See his “Bergson, Fichte und der Bergsonismus,” Conference paper: "Bergson und Deutschland. Das Problem der Lebensphilosophie", 2007a (conference paper), forthcoming in *Fichte studien*.
37 *Correspondances*, letter dated December 5th, 1914, 603-4.
38 See e.g., *Reclamation of the Freedom of Thought from the Princes of Europe, who have Hitherto Suppressed it* (1793)
39 *Correspondances, loc. cit.*

> of the philosophical use of the term "drive" [*pulsion*] (*Trieb*) (Introduction to FCI, 147).

The year 1898 is not irrelevant to Bergson's own philosophical development. He had only just completed *Matter and Memory* in 1898, a work where duration is explicitly posited as the prime category of reality. Two problems then pose themselves. One is the relation of duration to embodiment; the question of individuation that we have discussed above. The second problem concerns how we are to know of "duration"? It is precisely a question of *method* in philosophy. This question he develops in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, published in 1903, only a few years later. In *An Introduction*, Bergson opens by stating that a comparison of different conceptions of "the absolute" has lead him to "discover" that there are two forms of thought: one that is relative and analytical, the other "entering into the object" and *intuitive*.[40] For Fichte *philosophical intuition was key.*

The lecture course and the relation of Bergson and Fichte has so far received very little attention. Tthe introduction that Philip Soulez wrote for it aside, only two other French scholars, Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron of Potiers and Jean-Christophe Goddard of Toulouse Le Mirail have discussed the transcript.[41] Neither they, nor I claim any direct influence by Fichte on Bergson. When Bergson came to lecture on Fichte he was already 39 years of age and had already developed his own system too much to have been really influenced by him. In this thesis we will focus on the internal

40 Note also that "the absolute" had been completely absent from his two previous works.

41 Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron, “Bergson et Fichte,” in *Fichte et la France* (1997a), 201-220; and “Bergson et Nabert, lecteurs de Fichte,” (1997b), this article as concerns Bergson, is almost the same as the preceding article. Jean-Christophe Goddard, “Introduction à La Destination de l'homme,” in *La Destination de l'homme* (GF-Flammarion, 1995), 7-42; “Bergson: une lecture néo-platonicienne de Fichte,” *Les Études Philosophiques*, no. Bergson et l'idéalisme allemand (2001): 465-77 and Goddard 2007a.

development in Bergson's thought. It is this development that led him to write the works that he did. The juxtaposition of Bergson and Fichte will not be part of a historical-philosophical exegesis but will take place on the level of their philosophical systems. Regrettably, reasons of economy made that the lectures will not figure prominently in this thesis. To discuss both the lectures and their respective systems of thought more time and space would have been required than was available. For those wanting to know more about the lecture I either refer to existing literature or to a future, yet to be written work. What I will do to end this Introduction is to simply note a number of salient points from the lecture. Also, at a number of points in the thesis the lectures will be discussed. In the Conclusion we will discuss more explicitly the relation of Bergson and Fichte.

10. Some salient points from the lecture transcript

As we have already noted, both Fichte and Bergson were not satisfied with Kant's deduction. What needed to be shown much more clearly was how and why the matter and form of experience hold together. A transcendental deduction alone was deemed insufficient. Kant had done well to, as it were, "back-track" to the conditions of experience, but this needed to be complemented with a *genetic* derivation of experience from its conditions. That is, we need to demonstrate not only the move from the empirical to the transcendental, but also from the transcendental to the empirical. If in experience we find ourselves as subjects already opposed by an object, as two already constituted entities, and we posit something like spontaneous synthesis to account for

this opposition, can we then show that such synthesis is only ever possible with such a subject and object?

When Bergson is asked to lecture on Fichte he has only just completed *Matter and Memory*. Here he demonstrated how the forms of experience are so many "coagulated" (*figée*) actions, or habits of consciousness. Perception is not first and foremost about representation, but it is a form of action. Yet we do not appreciate this and content ourselves with the *result* of our actions. If we then try to understand how such ready-made forms of thought may be applied to ready-made objects our theory can only be an associationist one. Hence the need to investigate the conditions of the possibility of experience.

Much of this argument, notes Bergson in the lectures, is already to be found in Kant. How now to arrive at Fichte? First of all we need to contest that existence is something coagulated, and this results from Kant himself. "If by a thing in itself [Kant] had wanted to indicate something exterior to this activity [of consciousness], he would have been mistaken, but he did not want to say this" (FCI, 156). The difference does not lie here.

> [I]f all the intermediaries as provided by Kant are as many creations of this form itself, if we could show that the concepts deduce themselves (*se déduisent*) from the unity of apperception, we would come to affirm that even the matter of intuition is the creation of this form. Then instead of the disproportion that obliges us to consider form and matter as given, and thus the relativity of all knowledge, we will have a form that is sufficient to itself and becomes the absolute (*loc. cit.*).

This quote shows that Bergson saw full well the genetic solution to the problme of the relativity of knowledge, but also that he seems to think of it as absolute idealism. Because if even the materiality of experience (sensible intuitions) is seen as the product of consciousness then there is nothing outside consciousness. Hence Bergson writes in this same passage: with Kant there is critique, with Fichte metaphysics (*ibid.*). But this interpretation rests on precisely that which needs to be clarified, and which in many ways is central to this thesis. When Bergson writes that matter is a creation of the unity of apperception, how does he (and how does Fichte) understand this? How does he understand this "I"? What is the relation between consciousness, understood as ground of all experience, and the awareness I have of my own (empirical) consciousness? As Bergson notes astutely further on in the lecture series, we need to posit an I that overflows clear and individualised consciousness (*op. cit.,* 179). Discussing Fichte's *Foundations* he writes:

> In all acts of thought, [there are] two things to distinguish: the act itself, and its special determination, similar to every geometrical figure where there is space and limitation in space. This amounts to saying that the function overflows the accomplishment of the function. This posited, what then is the point of depart of [Fichte's] science of knowledge? The intellectual intuition of the pure I; the pure I is the function of positing. When this I posits itself, says *Ich bin Ich*, it limits the function of positing in general. It is this interval that, being exterior to posited I (*moi posé*) constitutes posited non-I. I would like to say that the function of self-positing cannot arrive at the act of positing without positing something or someone, and thus without the implication of a possible opposition, that is to say, the positing of someone or something that will replace the interval.
>
> This amounts to saying that the pure I as given in intellectual intuition is not the I that we find in *Ich bin Ich*. The first is evidently superior to consciousness. We only attain it by reflection, by a purification of consciousness. The second, that obtains itself (*s'obtient*) by actualisation, [by] limitation of the first, is the non-I of consciousness that only posits itself in opposing the first. Therefore, instead of the pure I there is an opposition of individualised I and

> non-I, which represents the arithmetical difference between individual I and pure I (*op. cit.,* 178).

This passage is extraordinary and could be discussed at length. Note, for instance, Bergson's use of "interval", a term not found in the *Foundations* but so very important to *Matter and Memory*. The interval lies between self-positing and self-limitation. In *Matter and Memory* the interval is linked to the "selection" from the totality of action, which constitutes a "centre of action" (see Ch. V, Sect. 2.2). It too concerns limitation! Bergson would like to say that self-positing can only *be* positing when it determines a someone and a something. This is precisely what Fichte wants to demonstrate. But this is also what Bergson had *assumed* in *Matter and Memory* and he will need to *demonstrate* in *Creative Evolution.* He assumed "selection" and an "interval" but why "life will at once establish in it a primary discontinuity" (MM, 334 / 198), he was unable to show.

We see then that Bergson understood very well that Fichte did not think there was nothing outside of individualised consciousness. Rather, this I, recognised as Kant's I, concerns the possibility and unity of experience (FCI, 156). Being absolute, it limits itself. And Bergson affirms that for him Kantianism is in harmony with Fichteanism (*op. cit.,* 157). As he writes when discussing Kant at the very start of the lecture series and prior to his discussion of Fichte: “The I think, applied to the manifold of intuition, creates subjects and objects” (*op. cit.,* 155). The I think creates *both* subject and object, that is, it creates both form and matter. How now does it create and what does this creation consist of? How should we distinguish this creation from that which it creates? In the passage quoted above we see that Bergson appreciated Fichte’s attempt to think

a purely spontaneous life, one that "posits itself" and *that it can only posit itself in positing another.* Self-positing and an a primary opposition of a (thereby) limited I and limited not-I hold together. However, Bergson also warns Fichte:

> In this form Fichte nears the Alexandrinism that poses the absolute below being; his philosophy becomes less and less original, more and more close to Alexandrinism (*op. cit.,* 179).[42]

When spontaneity becomes a transcendent absolute that is seen to exist below being and being becomes a mere manifestation of the absolute, all originality is in danger of being lost. We then fail to see how the two hold together. This is what Bergson means by Alexandrinism. The warning by Bergson is very pertinent. What this thesis will investigate is the extent to which Fichte *and* Bergson have managed to stay clear of such Alexandrinism.

The problem of Alexandrinism points to another important theme, one that will only become clear as the thesis unfolds and thus may only be indicated here. This is the question of the relation of philosophy to life. A philosophy that reduces life to an empty schematism would not be very original. But, as Maritain's critique of Bergson serves to warn us, the other extreme cannot be made sense of.[43] Thought is bound to concepts; an immediate knowledge of life cannot be expressed. Philosophy is an expression of life, but it is not identical to life. Hence the need for a philosophy of life to meditate on its own relation to life.

42 On Bergson and Alexandrinism see the already mentioned article by Goddard 2001 and Sylvain Roux, "L'ambiguïté néoplatonicienne: Bergson et la philosophie grecque dans L'Évolution créatrice," conference paper available on www.europhilosophie.eu/recherche/IMG/pdf/Sylvain_Roux.pdf.

43 See Maritain, 2007.

Part I: Fichte

I. TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY OF FREEDOM

The three chapters that make up the first part of this thesis discuss Fichte's theoretical work from the Jena period, with a special focuss on the *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*. In Chapter I we first discuss how certain criticisms made in the very first reception of Kant's philosophy form the point of departure for Fichte's own philosophy. Towards the end of the chapter these criticisms and Fichte's tentative remarks on a possible combined solution to these concerns will be formalised in the form of a set of demands or a programme for the desired philosophy of freedom.

Chapter II will discuss the *Foundations* in detailed manner, in light of the programme as formulated in Chapter I. We thus gain an intimate understanding of both Fichte's argument and also of the particular nature of this argument. Contrary to popular belief this is shown not to consist of a linear deduction, but rather a gradually deepening and widening; not linear but a spiral-shaped argument. In Chapter III we will reflect on the development thus far and make more explicit what the precise problem is when attempting to navigate determinism and freedom.

1. Between Kant and Fichte: Jacobi, Reinhold and Schulze

In the decade that lies between the first publication of the Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781 and Fichte's presentation in Jena of the *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* in 1794 there emerged a rapidly growing debate that centred around Kant's philosophy. Although immediately recognised as a water-shed in philosophy, the precise implications of this work were certainly less easy to grasp. This is hardly surprising as the technical language, the intricate argumentation and the subtle distinctions can be as perplexing today as they were then. In the first part of this chapter we will discuss three early commentators, who each had an important influence in that earliest reception of the Kantian philosophy. Although one might be tempted to dismiss some of their objections as unfounded, or as "clearly" going against the letter of Kant, we should not forget that even with over two hundred years of intense Kant-studies by practically all of the great philosophers, we continue to dispute "what Kant had really said". Knowledge of the criticisms and interpretations of Kant by Jacobi, Reinhold and Schulze, whether they be correct or incorrect allows us to understand the Kantian philosophy Fichte was responding to. As our reading will progress we will come to see that Fichte, rather than attempting to "overbid" Kant, in fact aimed to correct these criticisms.[1] We will see that, although engaged in an attempt to rewrite and clarify Kant's original position, Fichte remained faithful to the transcendental project.[2]

1 See also Manfred Frank, "Fragmente einer Geschichte der Selbstbewusstseinsheorie von Kant bis Sartre," in *Idem Selbsbewusstseinstheorien von Fichte bis Sartre* (Frankfurt am Mein: Suhrkamp, 1991), 449.

2 See also Alexander Schnell, "L'idée fondamentale du transcendentalisme fichtéen," *Archives de Philosophie* 72, no. 3 (September 2009): 405-22

1.1 Jacobi and the thing in itself

Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819) published his *David Hume on Faith; Or Idealism and Realism* in 1787, the same year that Kant published the second and revised edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the appendix "On Transcendental Idealism" Jacobi aimed to demonstrate the self-contradictory notion of a thing in itself. It is probable that Jacobi had already completed his manuscript and was thus unable to benefit from Kant's second edition, since his argument concerning the status of the thing in itself was precisely what Kant responded to in the revised section "On the Distinction Between the Phenomenal and the Noumenal". Yet the fact that even with the extra effort on Kant's part Jacobi's critique was of significant influence nonetheless indicates the difficulty of the matter at hand.

As we know Kant claimed a thing in itself. Although it was said to interact with our senses, Kant vehemently denied any possible knowledge of such a thing as it exists *in or for itself*. For Jacobi, as Wayne Martin explains, this contradicted with three of Kant's major claims. First of all, it conflicts with Kant's "quasi-phenomenalistic idealism". If things produce appearances in us, and these are "merely subjective beings, with no existence outside of us", then they cannot at the same time be the mind-independent entities that Kant needed to appease the realists.[3] If they are not mind-independent then how to vouchsafe the objectivity of knowledge? Secondly, the category of causality cannot be legitimately applied to the relation between the thing in itself and our senses as this is a category of the understanding that cannot be attributed to reality as such. Therefore, we cannot claim that it is the thing in itself that causes our

3 Jacobi as quoted in Wayne Martin, "From Kant to Fichte," in *Cambridge Companion to Fichte* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming, currently available on http://privatewww.essex.ac.uk/~wmartin), 4.

sensations. Finally, Kant claimed, indeed had to claim the unknowability of things in themselves. But if this is so, how are we then to claim any knowledge of them? Since Kant speaks of things in themselves, he obviously must have had such knowledge. Now, if Kant claimed that all we have are *Erscheinungen*, appearances or manifestations, but cannot claim that these are the appearances *of* something, then does this not leave us lost in mere illusion? Kantianism, concluded Jacobi, is thus incoherent. A thing in itself that we cannot know but that constitute the ground of our knowledge is an absurdity that needs to be rooted out. He thus called for a "speculative egoism" that removes all reference to a thing in itself.[4]

If we compare the first and second versions of the phenomenal-noumenal distinction (KrV A 249-53 with B 305-9 esp.) we see that Kant anticipated such objections. Although all we have knowledge of are *phenomena,* we can postulate other objects outside of their relation to the senses, and these are called *noumena.* This as such is perfectly legitimate, as long as we do not deceive ourselves in what we may *know* of them. As Kant specifies in the B-edition, such noumena may be said to be of two kinds: positive and negative. Negative noumena are objects in so far as we abstract from our specific way of knowing things (KrV B 307). The thing in itself is precisely such an object. Such an object is posited but no knowledge is claimed thereby. When, however, we speak of an object of a non-sensible intuition we speak of a positive noumenon, and it is this positive noumenon that must be rejected (*loc. cit.*). When we speak of negative noumena, we speak of objects as such, prior to any determination by us. Clearly this does not constitute any kind of knowledge. But a positive noumenon

4 See Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, "David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus. Ein Gespräch.," in *Werke 2,1* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2004), 229

would be an object given both in a non-sensible intuition *and* determined by thought, which indeed would be an absurdity.

However, although we may only speak of noumena in so far as they lie outside of all relation of determination by consciousness, and although by such an undetermined intuition no knowledge is ever given, the *form of thought*, that is, the way that objects are determined, remains (A 253-4 / B 309). The categories extend beyond sensible intuition because they think *objects in general*. Therefore the category of causality may be applied to the relation of things in themselves and sensibility as long as no knowledge is claimed thereby.

But if Kant had set out to demonstrate the legitimate domain of knowledge, and if this legitimate domain could only be knowledge that correctly combines intuitions and concepts, then how could Kant claim to *know* that the forms of thought themselves are able to think objects in general? How could Kant claim the existence of things in themselves, clearly a necessity in order to have intuitions, and yet not claim that this is a *knowledge*-claim? If we could not claim knowledge of the existence of things outside of us, then how different was Kant's theory from previous forms of idealism? Jacobi was neither the first, nor the only one to remark on this strange notion of an unknowable entity. Indeed, another important difference between the A and B editions is the "Refutation of Idealism". Here Kant tried to strengthen his argument that inner experience can only be possible under the condition of *outer* experience (B 275), without, however, completely succeeding in this demonstration.

The question of the thing in itself has, as Martin rightly points out, "often proved to be a misleading point of reference from which to construct an interpretation of

[Fichte's] positive philosophical doctrine."[5] Historically Fichte has often been understood to precisely take up Jacobi's cry for a speculative egoism that roots out the thing in itself. But as will become clear in the next chapter, Fichte in fact takes up Kant's claim that inner experience is only possible under the condition of outer experience. The *Foundations* of 1794 will demonstrate that subject and object, I and not-I, always appear in what he called "reciprocal determination".

1.2 Reinhold and the principle of representation

For a brief period Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1757-1823) was heralded by even the great Kant himself as a faithful representative of Kant's philosophical position. Reinhold's own philosophy only enjoyed a relatively limited success but the programmatic conditions he formulated *vis à vis* transcendental philosophy turned out to be of tremendous importance for Fichte and post-Fichtean philosophy.[6] Although an enthusiastic supporter of Kant's philosophy, Reinhold felt it lacked internal cohesion. To demonstrate what was wrong he distinguished between two levels of philosophy. The first level concerns the possibility and structure of the objects of cognition and desire and can be equated with metaphysics. The second concerns the structure of consciousness itself and the possibility of representation. Kant had established the possibility of metaphysics, or of what we may know, through a reflection on the conditions of consciousness and its objects. But, Reinhold claimed, he had done so in *ad hoc* fashion, that is, Kant had not proceeded systematically in his deduction. He had failed to show the connection between the two levels, and this was a result, Reinhold

5 Martin, forthcoming, 5.
6 See Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: lectures on German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 140.

felt, of his preoccupation with the objects of consciousness (representations or knowledge) rather than with consciousness itself. That is, although Kant had shown what we may know, he had failed to adequately ground the domain of knowledge. What was needed was to find the first principle from which the relations between subject and object, and between freedom and necessity could be shown. This highest principle, Reinhold was convinced, Kant must have possessed, but he never wanted, or otherwise was never able to, make it explicit.[7] This then, was what Reinhold set out to demonstrate.

The first principle, he said, had to be that from which subject and object, or theoretical and practical philosophy may be deduced. Such a first principle had to be something which could not be abstracted from the system, without at the same time assuming it as principle.[8] This, Reinhold said, could be nothing but the *fact of consciousness. Consciousness* must necessarily be presupposed and can never be abstracted from the system without leading to incoherence. This fact of consciousness had to be more specifically understood as the faculty of representations (*Vorstellungsvermögen*), since it is in representation that subject and object are joined. From the *fact* of consciousness thus analytically followed the principle of consciousness:

> [I]n consciousness representation is distinguished through the subject from both object and subject and is referred to both.[9]

7 Fichte will add an entire footnote on "hidden principle" to his 'Second Introduction'. He cites Kant from KrV A 82 / B 108. See ZE 479n / 63n. Frederick Neuhouser refers to the *Critique of Practical Reason* as the source for this idea. See Frederick Neuhouser, *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 22.

8 See Ernst-Otto Onnasch, “De fundering van de filosofie: de Wetenschapsleer van 1794/5,” in *Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Een inleiding in zijn denken*, ed. Paul Cruysberghs and Peter Jonkers (Kampen: Kok Agora, 1997), 75. Onnasch calls this a "final grounding" or *Letzbegründung.*

9 Karl Leonhard Reinhold, “The Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge (excerpt),” in *Between Kant and Hegel*, ed. George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 70. See also the discussion in Neuhouser 1990, 70ff.

Reinhold felt this principle would provide the first, indubitable point from which to derive the practical and theoretical philosophy as outlined by Kant.

Consciousness as *fact* was understood by Reinhold as a synthetic whole. Out of this synthetic whole the principle was derived in analytic fashion, meaning that this principle only made explicit what was contained within consciousness. Let us unpack the principle of consciousness a little.

Within consciousness there is representation. This representation is distinct from both the subject and the object. But at the same time it is also refered to the subject and the object. Hence we get the following schema:

1. a) Representation is distinct from the object:

- Representation is not the object as it is in itself. It is a representation of an object. The representation is distinct from the thing in itself.

1. b) Representation is distinct from the subject:

- What I am aware of is not me but an object outside of me. I can distinguish between subject- or self-consciousness and object-consciousness.

2. a) Representation is refered to the object:

- The representation concerns an object outside of myself, it is the representation of this object.

2. b) Representation is refered to the subject:

- It is my representation.

These four relations all take place “in consciousness” and “through the subject”. That is, these relations are deduced in immanent fashion, or from within our limited, discursive experience. We cannot claim an outside perspective from where to demonstrate the

principle of consciousness. Reinhold did not offer the schema above and in fact he was unable to explain how exactly the subject differed from the representation.[10] However, in its concise form it does provide an important key for understanding the problem that Fichte would later set out to solve in his *Foundations.*

In the *Foundations,* Fichte will also start with a single first principle, the Absolute I, to show how this differentiates into a subject and an object, and into theoretical and practical consciousness. This subject and object must both be kept distinct from the first principle, yet also refered to it. And the subject and object themselves must be distinguished, yet also refered to each other. We shall return to this after we have discussed Schulze's critique of Reinhold's principle.

Although one might be led to think that Reinhold's demand for a first principle constitutes a return to an earlier form of foundationalist philosophy made impossible precisely by Kant, its significance extends far beyond this.[11] True, the quest for a first indubitable point of departure, an Archimedean point of anchorage does not seem like anything new, but contained within it Reinhold raised an important point. Although Kant had admirably *demonstrated* the proper *kind* of philosophy, he had not, or at least not publicly, *reflected on* this philosophy.[12] What exactly is the status of transcendental knowledge? How is this knowledge possible? What are *its* limitations? These are question that Reinhold unwittingly raised and that would be picked up by Fichte. It is with Fichte that philosophy explicitely becomes an object for philosophical reflection. This will be seen more clearly when we come to the matter of intellectual intuition in

10 See also Onnasch 1997, 76-7.
11 See Henrich, 2003, p. 140 and Lectures IX and X generally. On Reinhold see also George di Giovanni, "The Facts of Consciousness", in *Between Kant and Hegel*, ed. George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000); Martin, "From Kant to Fichte"; §2; Neuhouser 1990, Chapter I.
12 See also Frank 1991, 433.

Section 3 below. Intellectual intuition ultimately concerns the status and nature of philosophical knowledge itself. As Bernard Bourgeois writes, it is by reinserting a reflection on philosophy into the very concept of philosophy that the relation between philosophy and her object, between philosophy and *life* is reinstated.[13] As Bourgeois quotes Fichte from the *First Introduction*:

> The kind of philosophy one chooses thus depends upon the kind of person one is. [And we continue the quote] For a philosophical system is not a lifeless household item one can put aside or pick up as one wishes; instead, it is animated by the very soul of the person who adopts it (EE 434 / 20).

1.3 The skeptical challenge: Schulze's *Aenesidemus*

After the unexpected success of his *An Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation*[14] the erstwhile completely unknown Fichte had been asked in 1793 by the prestigious *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* to review an important skeptical attack on Reinholdian and Kantian philosophy that had appeared under the anonymous pen-name of Aenesidemus. The author of this work was Gottlob Ernst Schulze (1761-1833). This was Fichte's first real opportunity to make a name for himself. In the review we find him striking a careful balance between agreeing with some of Schulze's criticisms and defending the Kantian / Reinholdian philosophy.

13 Bourgeois, 1995, 1-2.

14 Fichte had walked to Köningsbergen to meet Kant in the hope that he would be able to procure a post for him. In order to impress him he wrote, in the space of a number of weeks, this *Critique*. For some reason it was published without the name of the author. The style and content were so close to Kant's that it was immediately heralded as the long-awaited word of Kant on the matter of religion. When Kant was then forced to make known the true name of its author Fichte became famous overnight.

Schulze raises a whole list of objections, the most important of which have to do with the application of the category of causality to the relation between the faculty of representation and the representations themselves, an issue that Jacobi had also already raised.[15] Reinhold had made the faculty of representation the first principle. This faculty, Schulze claimed, was understood by Reinhold as the cause and ground of actual representations. Yet this faculty may only be inferred from actual representations.[16] What this meant, said Schulze, was that Reinhold had made an inference from *thought* existence to *real* existence, and hence had not proven anything at all. Schulze:

> The proof really consists in the following argument: Any two things that cannot be *thought* apart from one another can also not *be* apart from one another; the being and actuality of representations cannot be *thought* apart from the being and actuality of a faculty of representation.[17]

Reinhold's principle was a case of *petitio principii*.[18] He had concluded that, for something to be possible, a *Möglichkeit*, there has to be something, a capacity or faculty, that makes this possible, a *Vermögen*. Although Reinhold *could* be right, it by no means has been shown *that* he was right. The same may be said of Kant's highest point, the transcendental synthesis that is the ground of all representation. It may well be that we need to think such an original act of synthesis on the part of consciousness, but this does not mean that Kant had actually proven that this synthesis really does take place.

15 For a detailed analysis of Schulze's argument and of Fichte's response see di Giovanni, 2000, 20-32, see also Henrich 2003, Lecture X, XI.
16 Gottlob Ernst Schulze, "Aenesidemus Or Concerning the Foundations of The Philosophy of The Elements Issued by Prof. Reinhold in Jena Together with a Defence of Skepticism Against the Pretensions of The Critique of Reason. (excerpt)," in *Between Kant and Hegel*, ed. George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 107.
17 *Op. cit.,* 108.
18 *Op. cit.,* 113. See also George di Giovanni, 2000, 22.

1.4 Conclusion

Jacobi, Reinhold and Schulze each raised a number of important issues that, although perhaps not misunderstood by Kant himself, were widely felt to be in dire need of clarification. What is the nature and function of the thing in itself? How to understand the distinction between *phenomena* and *noumena*? What is transcendental *knowledge*? How do we understand the relation between transcendental and empirical knowledge? How do subject and object hold together? How do we prove the transcendental conditions? How is transcendental philosophy itself grounded? And what is a transcendental ground? These questions are clearly related and it was felt that, although Kant had been correct in so far as he had demonstrated the conditions of knowledge, the project was seen as incomplete. This was a challenge well-suited to a young philosopher from humble backgrounds that wanted to make a name for himself.

2. Consciousness is activity, not thing-like: the *Aenesidemus* review.

Schulze had accused Reinhold of question-begging, of having posited a capacity to explain the phenomena, without proving this capacity itself. It is here that Fichte, in coming to the aid of Reinhold and Kant, both ridicules Schulze and hits upon an insight that, although implicit in Kant, will come to surpass Kant.[19] How is it, writes Fichte in his *Review of Aenesidemus,* that

19 See also Henrich 2003, 172 on this point.

> the moments the words "faculty of representation" hit his [Schulze's] ear, [he] cannot think by them anything but a "thing" (Is it round, is it square?) that exists as thing in itself, *independent* of his *representing* it, and indeed as a thing *that represents*? (RA 11 / 143).[20]

The faculty of representation is not a thing, rather, Fichte continues:

> The faculty of representation exists *for* the faculty of representation and *through* the faculty of representation. This is the necessary circle in which any finite understanding (…) is locked (*loc. cit*).

What does Fichte mean when he says that the faculty of representation is not a thing? What does it mean that it exists only for and through itself? What is this circle in which finite understanding is locked? In his review Fichte only give us the barest of hints as to how all this is supposed to be understood. It will not be until the subsequent *Foundations* that Fichte will elaborate what he has so casually introduced here.

2.1 *Tathandlung*

The lead-up to Fichte's bold claim starts with a discussion of Reinhold's principle of representation. Reinhold had thought this principle to be simply an explication of what is the *fact* of consciousness. That is, he thought it to be an analytical principle. The relations of distinguishing and referring between the subject, the object and the representation followed out of the analysis of the fact of consciousness.[21] Schulze denied this claim and felt it to be merely synthetic. Fichte agrees with Schulze but for a "deeper ground" not seen by either Reinhold or Schulze (RA 6-7 / 140). He writes:

20 *Recension des Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der vom Herrn Prof. Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementarphilosophie* in *Sämmtliche Werke I*, translation in George di Giovanni and Henry Stilton Harris, *Between Kant and Hegel* (New York: SUNY). Abbr. to RA.

21 Reinhold 2000, 70.

> [O]bviously the performance of representing, the act of consciousness, is itself a synthesis (…), for it differentiates and refers; indeed, it is the highest synthesis, and the ground of all possible ones (*loc. cit.*).

At the ground of consciousness we find an act, the performance (*Handlung*) of representing, that differentiates and relates the subject, the object and the representation, and this is a synthetic act. Yet this act is not first made possible by an already constituted subject and object; rather, a subject and an object first follow out of this act. Prior to a subject and an object we must assume transcendental apperception. It is this that first allows for a differentiation of subject and object. This gives us some clues as to how consciousness can exist "for and through itself". Such unified consciousness is the first and primary synthetic act. Synthesis is thus to be presupposed prior to the thesis and antithesis of subject and object.[22] If this is so, then, asks Fichte, "how is *synthesis* to be thought without the presupposition of *thesis* and *antithesis*?" (RA 6-7 / 140). Yet, at this point Fichte is only able to raise this question; he does not have an answer ready.

Continuing his discussion of the *Aenesidemus,* Fichte notes that according to Schulze, Reinhold's principle is an abstract proposition and not, as Reinhold himself held, based on some alledged fact. If it is not a real and indubitable fact then it cannot ground a real philosophy.[23] Again, Fichte's response is nuanced. He writes that the principle of consciousness cannot be empirical alone; indeed, we necessarily abstract

22 Henrich considers this to be one of the key discoveries of German Idealism, see Henrich 2003, 166

23 Fichte: "we must have a real principle, and not a merely formal one" RA 8 / 141. As will become clear as this chapter unfolds, Fichte felt that until materiality had been deduced from transcendental synthesis, the status of the transcendental conditions has only hypothetical status.

from the empirical conditions in order to arrive at a “representation of representing in general” (*op. cit.,* 8/ 141). Hence the highest principle cannot be based on mere fact, as Reinhold wrongly assumed.

> If I may venture a claim which can be neither explained nor proven here – such a principle does not have to express a fact just as *content* [eine *Tatsache*, actual fact]; it can also express a fact as *performance* [eine *Tathandlung*, actual deed] (*loc. cit.*)

A *Tathandlung?* Indeed, Fichte offers neither proof nor explanation. The word play of *Tat-Sache* and *Tat-Handlung* would not at all have been self-apparent.

Tatsache is the German word for fact.[24] It is composed of the two common terms *Tat* and *Sache*. *Tat*, coming from the verb *Thun* (to do) means “deed”. *Sache* originally had the meaning of the object of a dispute and latterly took on the meaning of “case”, “affair” and also “thing”. The combination *Tatsache* appeared quite recently in Fichte’s days as a translation for the new scientific word “fact”, in the sense of “that what has undisputedly taken place”. Undoubtedly its scientific air greatly aided its rapid expansion. Contrary to what is generally assumed, the word *Tathandlung* did already exist as a juridical term but it is unclear whether Fichte was aware of this.[25] In any case it was Fichte who first coined it as a philosophical concept. *Handlung* has a meaning similar to *Tat* or deed; it connotes an activity, or rather, a series of activities. Originally *Handlung* was used to refer to the acts in a play, but generally it refers to a series of related activities being executed. As Lessing writes: "a series of movements

24 For the following see the respective lemmas in *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*. 16 Bde. [in 32 Teilbänden]. Leipzig: S. Hirzel 1854-1960. See also the lemma "Tathandlung" in excellent *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (im 13 Bände), eds. Gründer Ritter, *et. al.* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 1971-2007).

25 See "Tathandlung" in Ritter *et al.* 1971-2007.

(bewegungen) that aim for a final purpose (*endzweck*) is called a *handlung.*"[26] The English “to handle something” is quite close, as equally the of Latin root “manipulation”, both retaining the connotation of the operations of the hand, although both share a strong sense of something external that is being handled which is not quite appropriate here. Where *Tat* refers more strictly to its result, *Handlung* has a more open-ended relation to its purpose.[27] Between *Tatsache* and *Tathandlung* the difference translates more explicitly into one between the object or product of an action and the action as being-executed.

What Fichte wanted to bring out with this new term may be illuminated through an analogy with a term loosely borrowed from speech-act theory. J.L. Austin, in his *How To Do Things With Words,* defines a category of utterances as “performatives”.[28] These utterances look like sentences but actually they allow you to *do* something. For example, if a couple wants to wed, then certain actions will need to be performed. These include certain multi-conditional questions posed by a worldly or ecclesiastical representative, two affirmative responses by the couple being wed, and then the following statement by the representative: “I now declare you man and wife”. The truth-value of this last statement lies not in a factual correspondence of sentence *p* with some state of the world *x* (and clearly not that John and Mary are male and female respectively, but that they are now joined in wed-lock), that is: “p = x” is true if and only if “x” is true. Rather, the “truth” of the sentence is precisely dependent on the execution of the sentence; it cannot correspond with ”x” as the situation x first only

26 As quoted in Grimm and Grimm 1854-1960, in the lemma ‘Handlung’.
27 DiGiovanni translates the compound as “fact as performance”, Heath and Lachs in their translation of the *Grundlage* opted for “Act”; Daniel Breazeale follows Heath and Lachs, see Breazeale 1994, editors footnote 48n.
28 J.L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 6.

comes into being *with* the utterance of *p*. The realization of the sentence, i.e., its actual performance, is what makes the sentence true. Its "truth-condition" is thus self-referential without being analytical. Hence it is a performative utterance. A performative utterance, or a factual activity thus combines two qualities or aspects: as performance it certainly *is* something, namely *this* performance, *this* sequence of acts, and it is a doing that has results, namely the performance itself. As Isabelle Thomas-Fogiel writes in her excellent *Critique de la représentation*:

> When the announcement is pronounced, it is realised. In this sense the first principle functions like a performative announcement (*énoncé performatif*) that is factual when it speaks itself (*qui est du fait même qu'il se dit*).[29]

Fichte looked for a word that would place the result of an activity within that activity itself. Clearly his use of the term *Tathandlung* exceeds a mere linguistic application but what a comparison with Austin's term does bring out is that a performative statement is a type of speech-act that at least in part contains its own truth-conditions and that the truth of the sentence thus has an inherent relation to the performance of the sentence. One thing that this means, and this will be important later on, is that the "truth-value" of the sentence can never be evaluated or judged *in abstracto*. Whether or not the performative utterance *p* is true can only be judged by evaluating its actual state. There has to be a specific, that is, *determinate,* utterance, delivered within a specific set of conditions, for us to be able to evaluate its truth-claim.[30] Fichte looked for such a term for a number of reasons. Firstly, Reinhold thought

29 See Isabelle Thomas-Fogiel, *Critique de la représentation. Étude sur Fichte* (Paris: Vrin, 2000), 77. She also refers to *Tathandlung* as *"dire-faire"* refering to an unspecified Fichte scholar (*ibid*.).

30 The sentence "grass is green" is true if and only if there is a perception of something that both refers to "grass" and to "green". The truth of this sentence can be evaluated without any

his first principle was analytic; Fichte thought one should start from synthesis as highest principle. Secondly, Reinhold felt that for philosophy to be real and not merely hypothetical (contra Kant) we should start with some indubitable fact of consciousness. Fichte agreed with the need for a real philosophy but felt a merely empirical point of anchorage to be inadequate to the loftier aims of transcendental philosophy. Thirdly, Fichte had become convinced that we must assume an immediate act of consciousness that exists for and through itself if we wanted to really understand consciousness (we will discuss this presently). *Tathandlung* aims to meet these three demands.

The transcendental act of synthesis understood as *Handlung* (operation / manipulation) refers to a sequence of acts (of referring and distinguishing) to be executed. With the actual performance of these acts there first results a subject and an object of experience. Because they occur *with* the *Tathandlung* and because they equally make the *Tathandlung* first possible (as without them the *Tathandlung* would not take place) neither side can be merely analytically deduced from the other. Secondly, a *Tathandlung* is never abstract because it cannot be evaluated outside of its actual performance and its actual conditions. The truth of the performance is inherently related to a determinate set of conditions. Hence it is always “real” or "site-specific". *These* activities make it *this* performance. Thirdly, the relation between the performance of the *Tathandlung* and its results (consciousness and its objects) is thus in and through itself, and not mediated. Let me just repeat that even for Fichte himself this had not yet become fully apparent. It will be in the *Foundations* that Fichte will aim to make explicit all that is contained in the *Tathandlung*.

reference to this sentence itself. The sentence “I now declare you man and wife”, however, can never be evaluated without reference to the actual uttering of this sentence (plus other supporting conditions).

2.2 Self-consciousness and the reflection model of consciousness

According to a reading that has been very prominent, when Fichte writes that consciousness is not a thing but an activity that exists for and through itself, he is said to have effectively cut a Gordian knot in philosophy. The problem that is addressed is said to concern the nature of self-consciousness. Dieter Henrich was the first to formulate the problem in this way in a very influential article first published in 1966 called “Fichte’s Original Insight”. Fichte’s insight is situated within a debate of self-consciousness in light of what Henrich has called the traditional understanding in terms of “the reflection model of consciousness.”[31] This model consists of the following set of claims: consciousness means consciousness of something; consciousness is representational or object-oriented, and this representation is, as it where, represented to (*Vor-gestellt)* the subject of consciousness. The object hence stands opposed to the subject. But to be aware of an object, one also needs to be aware *that* one is aware of the object. Object-consciousness thus requires self-consciousness, for otherwise one could be aware of an object without being aware that one is aware, which would be absurd. If one did not know that one was conscious of some object then this consciousness would be no different than the consciousness of the pond that reflects the image of Narcissus. Self-consciousness requires that one knows oneself and thus includes a relation to oneself. A relation to oneself means that one takes one’s self as an object of consciousness. How do you know that this object (i.e., the self) is really ne

31 See Dieter Henrich, "Fichte's Original Insight", *Contemporary German Philosophy* 1 (1982, first published in 1966), 19, 21. See also Manfred Frank, “'Intellektuale Anschauung.' Drei Stellungnahmen zu eimen Deutungsversuch von Selbstbewußtsein: Kant, Fichte, Hölderlin/Novalis,” in *Die Aktualität der Frühromantik* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1987), 113; Frank 1991, 434. Thomas-Fogiel makes the same point on p. 74 to Thomas-Fogiel 2000 and must be situated in the same school.

and same (i.e., identical) as oneself? For self-consciousness to be really consciousness of the self and not of some object closely resembling it (e.g., the unconscious, the body, or the "vat" in which our brain is sometimes thought to be suspended). We need to be able to recognise this self as identical to the self. But this is exactly to presuppose what we aim to establish. Henrich:

> Thus anyone who sets reflection into motion must himself already be both the knower and the known. The subject of reflection on its own thereby satisfies the whole equation "I = I". Yet reflection alone was supposed to bring about this equation.[32]

If to be conscious of something we have to presuppose self-consciousness, and if self-consciousness presupposes a relation of identity of self with itself then neither self-consciousness nor consciousness appears to be possible. According to Henrich then, Fichte effectively cuts this knot by assuming immediacy of consciousness. This is why he writes that the faculty of representation is not a thing but that it exists for and through itself. Now, in a way Fichte had spoken before he had properly reflected on the matter, it will be only later that this will be made explicit.[33]

2.3 Kant and the transcendental unity of apperception.

Manfred Frank, who was a student of Henrich continues this line of thought when he claims that Kant was both commited to a representation model of consciousness and to the Cartesian immediacy of the "I think". According to Frank these two commitments

32 *Op. cit.*, 20.
33 See Henrich, 2003, 232. See also Sect. 3.2 below.

created a dilemma that Kant was able to see but was unable to evade.[34] On the one hand Kant clearly stated that all knowledge was representational, with the further specification that representations were composed of sensible intuitions and the concepts of the understanding. Only if intuitions could be given to the senses and brought under concepts could we speak of a possible object of experience. Insofar as self-consciousness concerned *empirical* self-consciousness, this was fairly unproblematic. The empirical self can be an object of experience; intuitions of it may be given and the knowledge that results falls under the same classification as other areas of knowledge, hence such knowledge is fallible, *et cetera*.

But Kant also appealed to the "I think". Only under the assumption of the transcendental unity of *apperception,* or *self-consciousness*, could we explain how intuitions and concepts were united in representation. This form of consciousness had to be thought of as "pure" and "original", i.e., not given by the senses, and "prior to all thinking" (KrV B 131-2). This "original-synthetic unity of apperception" had to be able to accompany all my representations, "otherwise something would be represented in me that would not be thought at all" (*loc. cit.*). That is, for there to be object-consciousness (representations), we need to assume self-consciousness. Self-consciousness, as a first principle that makes all experience possible, could thus not be given to the senses, hence Kant states that it is given in an intuition (*ibid.*).

The problem this creates is the following. If all knowledge must contain sensible intuitions and concepts of the understanding, then what to make of the "I think": a representation that Kant claims is able to accompany all my other representations? This, in fact, was effectively the point raised by Schulze. If Kant does not want to be

34 Frank 1991, 446.

accused of begging the question by postulating a capacity for synthesis on the part of consciousness in order to account for the unity of experience, then he will have explain what the status of this insight is. Is this something factual, merely a postulate, does it accrue immediate certainty? If this is not the same as empirical self-consciousness but another type of consciousness, is it something real or merely hypothetical? Kant himself certainly struggled with this question as we can see from the following passage where he tries to explain the "I think", something he has just called "an indeterminate empirical intuition, i.e., a perception" (KrV B 422, see also A 343 / B 400):

> An indeterminate perception here signifies only something real, which was given, and indeed only to thinking itself, thus not as appearance, and also not as thing in itself (a noumenon), but rather as something that *does in fact exist* and is indicated as an existing thing in the proposition 'I think' (KrV B 423, emp. added).

The "I think" is not an appearance, nor is it a thing in itself, or we could say, an "I in itself". It somehow has a certain empirical quality, yet it is not given to the sense. But neither is it merely postulated, rather, it is immediately certain. Hence it is given in an intuition. Yet Kant had also denied anything other than *empirical* intuitions. How then is it to be known?

We have seen then that there is a fair amount of disambiguation as to the precise status and nature of the I. For Frank, Henrich, Pippin, who bases much of his reading on Henrich, and to an extent also Paul Franks' important reading, the problem this creates for Fichte (rightly or wrongly) is one of how to account for self-consciousness, *conceived as self-identification*, without falling into an infinite regress.[35] If self-

35 See Frank 1987, 19981; Henrich 1982, 2003; Pippin 1989 and Paul W. Franks *All or Nothing. Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA:

consciousness assumes something like consciousness of oneself by oneself, yet all consciousness is mediated, then an infinite regress seems hard to avoid. Now, to an extent Fichte does seem to incline this way. As we shall see Fichte does claim that when we "think the I", this is both agent and action. And in the *Foundations* an important role seems to be attributed to a derivation from "I=I". Hence he seems to pursue a relation of self-identity. But although Fichte might himself have inclined to think in terms of self-identification, what we will come to see is that "self-positing" is not concerned with the attempt to establish a relation of identity with myself, but rather with an account that is properly transcendental (in the sense of not overstepping the bounds of cognition) of how from within "self-positing" a relation of I and *not-I* is first to be understood. What Fichte gives an account of it is the precise *relation* of I and world in a way that lets us understand why and how such a relation must be thought. Hence he does not already assume an I or a not-I. But what he shows in the *Foundations,* and this we will demonstrate in Chapter II, is that determination itself *qua determination* entails a determinate and a determined pole. What the problem of self-consciousness as discussed by Henrich *et alia* does demonstrate is that a purely representationalist account is unable to think this relation or *Verhältnis* of subject and object in co-genetic fashion.[36] Fichte's insight into the difference between "activity" and thing points to his later exposition of subject and object as kinds of processes that are co-related.

But we have gotten ahead of ourselves. The ambiguity as to the nature and possibility of any knowledge of the I has historically been understood as a debate on

Harvard University Press, 2005).

36 It was Manfred Frank who first got me interested in Fichte during a course on Self-awareness and Self-knowledge that I was fortunate enough to be able to attend as a student during an exchange with the New School University in 1999.

the issue of “intellectual intuition”. This we will discuss in the next section.3. Intellectual Intuition /1: Kant and Fichte

It is a well-know fact: Kant denied intellectual intuition, whereas Fichte endorsed it, and claimed, moreover, that Kant himself had had to appeal to it. But did they both have the same concept in mind? Too often this has been asumed to be the case.[37] But as Moltke S. Gram has shown, Kant discussed not one but at least three different types of intellectual intuition; and furthermore, Fichte transgresses none of these.

3.1 Kant

In the article "Intellectual Intuition: The Continuity Thesis" Gram distinguishes between three types of intellectual intuition, all of which designate different problems for Kant. Kant uses the concept of intellectual intuition to bring out the specificity of *human* understanding. The three questions that are raised in the discussion of intellectual intuition are: In what sense is human understanding discrete? In what sense is it limited? And in what sense is it mediated? To bring out these qualities Kant will recourse to non-human or hypothetical forms of understanding; forms we might be able to conceive but that we cannot comprehend.

37 Some examples of literature to the contrary are 1.) On Kant, Fichte and Novalis: Frank 1987, 96-126; 2.) On Kant, Fichte, Schelling: Moltke S. Gram, "Intellectual Intuition: The Continuity Thesis", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 42 (1981); 3.) On Fichte, Schelling and Hegel: Alexis Philonenko, "Die Intellektuelle Anschauung bei Fichte", in *Études kantiennes* (Paris: Vrin, 1981) 197-212; 4.) On Fichte: Dan Breazeale "Fichte's Nova Methodo Phenomenologica: On the methodological role of 'intellectual intuition' in the later Jena Wissenschafslehre", *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 52, no. 4 (1998) 587-618; Breazeale lists further literature in footnote 6 to p. 592 of his article. We will return to Breazeale's article in Ch. III, Sect. 3.

3.1.1 A non-sensible intellect

For Kant sense-impressions are always mediated by the pure forms of intuition, time and space. Because time and space are not objective qualities it becomes logically possible to conceive of an understanding that will be able to grasp objects outside of such forms. Such an understanding will have a non-sensible intuition of the things in themselves (KrV A 249, B 307). This intuition he names intellectual.[38] In the B version of the phenomenal-noumenal distinction Kant further clarified this issue. The categories of thought do not have their origin in sensibility but in the mind. Therefore, they "seem to allow" for an application outside of the conditions of sensibility (B 305). Now, if this is done so as to think "beings of the understanding", or *noumena*, in order to reflect on the conditions of knowledge then this is perfectly permissible (B 306). What we should guard ourselves for is to assume that in doing so a *determinate* object is thought, that is, a positive noumenon (B 307). That is to say, we may use noumena or concepts to reflect on the conditions of knowledge, but this does not entail any actual knowledge of some object in the world.

In the case of such a non-sensible, hence intellectual, intuition the distinction between appearance and thing in itself would disappear although we would still maintain a separation between object and understanding, i.e., the object is still given to the understanding and not created by it.[39] This is still a form of *critical* understanding, in that it maintains the separation of mind and world, but it would not be able to function to accord with the skeptical charge that we can never know the world as it is in itself. As such Kant could not allow it (A 256 / B 308, B 312).

38 Gram 1981, 289.
39 Gram 1981, 289-91.

3.1.2 A synthetic intellect

The second form of problematic understanding that Gram distinguishes is the “synoptic or synthetic intellect”.[40] This would be an intellect that starts from an intuition of the Whole or from a synthetic universal. As such it is opposed to a discursive intellect that uses analytic universals. This form of understanding appears in paragraph §77 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment.* There Kant tried to clarify the concept of purpose or natural end.

As Kant states in the "First Introduction" if we approach nature as producing forms mechanically, our unity will only be an aggregate.[41] If we approach her as producing forms artistically or technically, our unity will be a system. Now either all generation of forms is mechanical, or some generation is not. The problem with a mechanical account of generation is that, although provided to us *a priori* by the understanding, we can neither disprove it, nor is it capable of explaining generation (KU §70). But what would be a non-mechanical account of generation? If we look at natural forms we find two things: they exhibit natural necessity, i.e., a purposiveness, and at the same time contingency of form with respect to the laws of nature. Such a concept combining the two would be excessive for consciousness (KU §74). To clarify this point Kant then opposes our limited human understanding to a form of understanding he names *intuitiv*.[42]

40 Gram 1981, 292-3
41 *First Introduction* in found in *Kant's gesammelten Schriften XX,* p. 217. Translation KU, 20.
42 What is interesting to note is that on three occasions in this paragraph Kant uses the adjective *intuitiv(en)* rather than his preferred term *Anschauung*. Unfortunately this is not noted in the otherwise excellent translation. I am not an expert of the German language and so I am receptive to suggestions from experts in the field, but such a use seems to be rather significant. Normally intellectual intuition (*Anschauung)* is opposed to sensible intuition. Here intuitive (*intuitiven)* understanding is opposed to discursive understanding.

Our limited, human understanding contains a discursive element which concerns the correct application of *a priori* concepts and an empirical element, that is, it demands a sensible manifold given in intuition. It combines common or universal (*allgemeinen*) concepts with the given manifold of intuition. Because there are many different ways in which the particulars of sensibility can be combined with concepts this combination is always contingent. This is because we start from an *analytic* universal and not from a *synthetic* universal (KU §77). An intuitive understanding in the second sense would start from a synthetic universal, which is an intuition of the whole, to then progress to a determination of the particular. This combination of parts would not be contingent precisely because it starts from the whole. Our understanding, however, must always proceed from parts to whole. We must think the whole of knowledge but such a whole is only a regulative Idea for the understanding. The second use of intellectual intuition thus brings out the contingent nature of our knowledge. It is logically distinct from the first type but still consistent with a separation of the object of understanding and the understanding itself.

3.1.3 *Intellectus archetypus*

The third type of problematic intellect that Gram distinguishes is a creative, or archetypal intellect (*intellectus archetypus*).[43] Such an intellect would create its own object. What it creates would be neither a thing in itself nor an appearance. We may understand God's intuition to be something of this kind. This *ürbildliches* intellect removes the distinction between the actuality and possibility of things (see KU §§ 76-

43 Gram 1981, 291-2.

77, esp. 402 / 272). This is, in fact, as Gram notes, a problem outside the critical theory of knowledge, as it no longer distinguishes between an object of knowledge and the act of knowing.[44] There is no place here for a thing in itself that, however problematically, has some causal efficacy in the world. Equally, the idea of concepts and categories structuring our experience is removed.

These are the three main types of problematic intellect that Gram distinguishes. It brings out the extend to which our understanding is dependent on the conditions of sensibility, the contingency of the application of concepts and the difference between actuality and possibility. To explain this Kant uses different notions of intellectual intuition. In all three cases such a notion, although conceivable, must be rejected. When Fichte is accused of an illegitimate use of intellectual intuition it is often in one of these forms, or more common yet, in a combination of two or more of these forms as generally the different types are not differentiated.

3.2 "Think the I"

Let us turn to the text where Fichte defends his use of intellectual intuition. The three texts known as *An Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* were published in four separate instalments between February 1797 and March 1798. The texts, consisting of two introductions, one for people "without", the other for people "with a philosophical system of their own" and a "Chapter One" are among the rare texts made public during Fichte's life in which he presents an introduction to his system and that were also written expressly for publication. They are to be understood in the light of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo,* the new presentation of his system at

44 Gram 1981, 292.

the University of Jena in the years 1796 to 1799, after his lectures on the *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* from 1794/95 and before his calamitous and unfortunate departure in 1799 for Berlin following the so-called Atheism Controversy. It is in *An Attempt* that Fichte explicitly thematises the notion of intellectual intuition, in part also out of the necessity to distinguish his position from Schelling's presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, one that was growing in popularity and that was often confused with his own.[45]

Think the "I" and pay close attention to how you do this, Fichte asks of us in his characteristic fashion in "Chapter One" of *An Attempt*. – *Now think of something else*. What you notice when you pay close attention to how you do this is a transition in thought. Thought, fixed on one point, detaches itself and focuses on another point. This transition from one point to another shows us something important about thought, it shows us that thought is an activity; it is the activity of determining *(Bestimmen)* its object. For Fichte, this determination of an object is the same as the synthetic transcendental activity uncovered by Kant. When we pay attention to how we think we become aware of a change between a fixation on a point and a tearing-itself away, a transition to another point. This activity is simply what thought is, the on-going process of the determination of objects. Whether we are explicitly aware of it or not, this is an uninterrupted process.

When we pay attention to how we think, thought turn backs on to itself. This is what Fichte means when he says: "Think the I". It is the thought process itself we are trying to think. For Fichte this I is the same as Kant's "I think" that necessarily has to be able to accompany all my representations. The transcendental unity of apperception

45 See Lauth 1975, Ch. I; Philonenko 1981, 198. See also below at Sect. 4.4.

that accompanies all synthetic *a priori* judgements is what is represented by the "I". In "Chapter One" Fichte tries to bring his reader to the proper starting point. Hence the appeal to "think the I" is a first step in becoming aware of the active nature of consciousness as a form of determination. The argument from "Chapter One" unfortunately ended with that one chapter. But the texts from *An Attempt* run in clear parallel to the *nova methodo* exposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre* that Fichte presented at the time at the university. There it becomes clear that, although Fichte asks of us to think the I, and although he says that we must assume an immediate awareness of the I, it is not the I as form of self-identification that Fichte is emphasising. Although there is reason to say, as the Henrich school has, that Fichte posits a form of immediate consciousness in an attempt to evade the infinite regress that a representationalist model of consciousness would create, this does not as such entail that Fichte assumes the solution to be a form of immediate self-consciousness that consists of a self *identification,* neither does it entail that the exact argument as we find it (his own self-understanding aside) is one that is most favourably read as such a form of consciousness Rather, and as should become more clear when we turn to a detailed analysis of the *Foundations* in the next chapter, although Fichte does write that immediate self-consciousness must accompany all consciousness, this immediate *self*-consciousness can only posited as *active* when a "state of repose" is posited in opposition to it (WLnm 66, summary of §1). Hence "self"-consciousness contains a fundamental duality of activity and passivity, or that of an I and a not-I. It is this relation that is stressed, not some self-equation. What is immediate is the awareness of the active nature of consciousness as the activity of determination. This Fichte claims on many occasions, must be seen as grasped in an intellectual intuition. It is the activity

that is grasped, not the I that grasps itself qua I. And, as we will see presently, such an intellectual intuition must always be thought in conjunction with an empirical intuition. The Henrich school places too much emphasis on subjectivity, others, such as Wayne Martin in his *Idealism and Objectivity* stress the problem of objectivity.[46] But what is so important about Fichte is the relation between the two.

That apperception results from pure spontaneity meant for Fichte that it depends only on consciousness itself. Spontaneity (*Selbsttätigkeit* - "self-activeness") means active "in and through itself". Therefore, for Fichte, even Kant assumed, indeed, had to assume, a form of immediate consciousness. For Fichte immediate consciousness does not require the taking of oneself as object (self-identification) in order to be conscious. We can, however, become explicitly aware of this consciousness because such consciousness does not consist of a spatio-temporal object, but of an awareness of our own spontaneous activity. What we are aware of is activity, activity that is the very essence of consciousness.

Explicit self-consciousness thus becomes a form of attention that can accompany the activity of determining an object. Such an awareness is not sensible because it does not concern an external object, however, it is immediate as consciousness is directed towards itself or takes itself as "object". For these reasons Fichte felt justified in calling this intellectual intuition. As we have seen above, one of the things Kant forbade was an intuition by the intellect alone, hence bypassing the senses, of an external sensible object. But here we have to do with an awareness of the activity that is consciousness and not of an object outside of consciousness. As Fichte writes, Kant hinted at such a form of consciousness but never openly discussed it (see ZE 472 / 56).

46 W. Martin *Idealism and Objectivity. Understanding Fichte's Jena Project* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

Bergson, in his *Lectures on Fichte* also notes this essential difference. Although an appeal to intellectual intuition seems to be in clear contradiction with Kant "this is only an appearance and the same words do not designate the same things" (FCI, 171):

> For Kant all distinctions are referred to a posited and rigid thing, so that an intellectual intuition would then be the awareness of a non-sensible being, a thing in itself. (...) On the contrary, that on which rests the *Wissenschaftslehre* does not refer to a being but to an action, an acting (*loc. cit.*)

When Kant forbade the use of intellectual intuition he had a number of things in mind. Such an intuition, as we have seen, could entail (1.) an intellect that applies concepts to what comes to the senses without the mediation of the pure forms of space and time, i.e., an immediate awareness of things in themselves; or (2.) the intuition of the whole of experience, one that surpasses our contingent application of concepts, or finally (3.) an intuition that would create its own object. As we now see Fichte's intellectual intuition concerns none of these.

Concerning the first form Fichte writes in the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* that what Kant prohibited was in fact a *sensible* intellectual intuition. That is, an intellectual (non-sensible) intuition of something sensible, i.e., the thing in itself. That is to say, a direct knowledge by the intellect alone of something that can only come to us through the senses. Such an intuition would clearly be absurd. But Fichte does not claim an intuition of some external thing that comes to us via the senses; rather, we have an immediate awareness or intuition of our own spontaneous inner activity, an activity we have to presuppose along with all forms of empirical consciousness. This is a form of intuition Kant could not deny. Fichte:

> What is intuited in sensible intuition is fixed, passive and ordinarily in space; but all that is intuited in our intellectual intuition is an acting. Kant too has such an intuition, but he did not reflect upon it. Indeed his entire philosophy is a product of this intuition; for he maintained that necessary representations are products of the acting of a rational being and are not passively received. But this is something he could have come to realize only by means of an intuition (WLnm 32 / 115).[47]

Kant could not deny this form of intuition because our awareness of the synthetic unity of apperception could never be derived from empirical consciousness; rather it is what first makes it possible (e.g., KrV B 130-31). The confusion arises because Kant considered the possibility of intellectual intuition in separation from empirical intuition. This, however, is impossible. As Fichte points out, just like empirical intuition is only possible in combination with intellectual intuition (i.e. apperception) so is intellectual intuition only possible in combination with empirical intuition. Fichte:

> I cannot discover myself to be acting without also discovering some object upon which I act; and I discover this object by means of sensory intuition, which I grasp by means of a concept (ZE 464 / 47).

47 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo.* Kollegnachtschrift K. Chr. Krausse. edited by Erich Fuchs (Hamburg: Meiner, 1982, zweite verbesserte Auflage, 1994); translation in *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (Wissenschaftslehre) nova methodo (1796/99),* translated and edited by Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). Abbr. to WLnm.

The two together are what constitute “completed consciousness” (*ibid.*).[48] Kant did not see this clearly enough and considered apperception in abstraction from empirical intuition. Hence such awkward formulations as “indeterminate empirical intuition” and the like (KrV B 422, see also A 343 / B 400).

Again Bergson agrees with Fichte on this point. He cites from KrV B §17 where Kant writes that all representations must be accompanied by the “I think”. This representation “I think” is an act of spontaneity. This act, as Kant himself writes, is given in pure apperception and not in empirical apperception, hence Kant, too, appealed to intellectual intuition (FCI, 171).

Hints that Kant understood that intellectual intuition only ever appears with empirical intuition may be deduced from the footnote to KrV B 422 where Kant tries to explain the paradoxically empirical character of apperception. He writes:

> For it is to be noted that if I have called the proposition “I think” an empirical proposition, I would not say by this that the **I** in this proposition is an empirical representation; for it is rather purely intellectual, because it belongs to thinking in general. Only *without* any empirical representation, which provides the material for thinking, the act "I think" *would not* take place, and the empirical is only *the condition of the application*, or use, of the pure intellectual faculty (emp. added in italics).

48 One commentator, and certainly not the only one, to accuse Fichte of having removed all reference to a thing in itself is Karl Ameriks in his *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). He accuses Fichte of what he calls a “short argument to idealism”, in contrast with Kant’s own long argument. This short argument would conclude that all knowledge is restricted to the phenomenal (163, 163). He argues this point very sloppily (at least as concerns Fichte) to conclude that Fichte is reluctant “to accept a ‘given’” (176). His main textual evidence seems to be a loose reference to *The Vocation of Man* (reference is only given to Part III as a whole) where he simply assumes that Fichte is speaking of Kant (173, 173n). But of course the *Vocation* was explicitly intended as a popular work and not a single instance of a name is found therein. Indeed, he supports his claim by quoting, not Fichte, but *Jacobi* (173n). Upon further inspection I found in the 101 pages dedicated to Fichte only *two* references to Fichte’s *Foundations*, and both were indirect! (see n54 to 229 and n37 to 249). Equally he decides to “bracket” the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (n14 to 202). When the main theoretical works are left undiscussed, it becomes difficult to interpret the more popular works correctly.

This we may read to imply the following: the I of the "I think" is purely intellectual, it pertains only to thought, it is the synthetic *a priori* activity of the understanding and as such not empirical. But this "I think" - as synthetic activity - needs some material or content (Ger.: *Stoff*) for it to take place. The "I think" combines intuitions with concepts. This results in representations, hence without such empirical representations it would not be anything. The I is thus empirical in that without some content it would be nothing, although it itself is not empirical. Hence we see that subject-consciousness always appears with object-consciousness though it cannot be equated with it. Fichte will greatly clarify this issue by showing how subject-consciousness always appears in "reciprocal determination" with object-consciousness (the limited I and the limited not-I of the *Foundations*).

Fichte's reply to the second and third forms of intuition prohibited by Kant require a more extensive presentation of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* than is possible at this point. In his *Foundations* we find a "limited I" and a "limited not-I" (*grosso modo* a subject and an object). The two are fundamentally opposed. This limited I appears with – and can only appear with – the limited not-I. From a transcendental perspective we see that they are reciprocally constitutive of each other. Taking inspiration from Kant's Third Critique, Fichte writes that from the practical perspective a perfect or complete knowledge of the world is an Ideal of Reason, something to be striven for but one that can never be attained. The not-I is what is not the I, it is what remains fundamentally unknown, hence an intuition of the whole is only possible at the cost of removing the distinction between the I and the not-I. Otherwise put: object-consciousness and self-consciousness are genetically connected.[49]

49 See also Gram 1981, 298

This also provides the reason for why the third form of intellectual intuition, a creative or *ürbildliches* consciousness, is not possible. One of the key stakes of Fichte's *Foundations* is to provide a deduction of the role and place of Kant's thing in itself from the very conditions of possibility of experience. As we will come to see in Chapter II, Fichte will attempt to demonstrate that the limited I, or a constituted consciousness only appears with, or is co-genetic with, a limited not-I, or a constituted object of consciousness. The problem of an unknowable yet somehow causally effective thing in itself is thus clarified. For a subject to be confronted with an object we must assume a relation of determination where one side is seen as the determining pole and the other as the determined pole. Hence it makes no sense to speak of an object outside of any relation to a subject. However, because Fichte sees the two as opposite and distinct poles he is able to retain a separation of the two, thus avoiding the pitfalls of absolute idealism. Throughout this endeavour Fichte remains faithful to the transcendental restraints. Whenever he writes that the not-I is created by the I this always means as a not-I *for the I*. As we cannot speak meaningfully or with content of objects outside of their relation to consciousness, Fichte sometimes omits this disclaimer. But it is clear that for Fichte a subject that would create its object *realiter* would be absurd, as equally the possibility of there being nothing outside of consciousness *realiter* (contra a solipsistic consciousness). As our discussion will unfold, and especially when we come to discuss the *Foundations* in Chapter II of this thesis, we will come to see that to speak of any object, and to be able to determine any object, it must already be seen to stand in a relation to a subject. Hence it makes no sense to affirm a thing in itself standing outside of any relation to me. For anything to be anything *for me* it needs, in Fichte's parlance, to be "posited" by me. This is intended to explain how objects appear *qua*

objects. That there are objects "out there", real existing objects that are different for me for Fichte is unproblematic. The question, rather, is how to account for our experience of them, precisely because they are different from us (see Fichte's comment on ZE 455n and 458 / 38n, 41).

Intellectual intuition for Fichte is first and foremost attentiveness to how we think. As thought reverting back to itself it is not concerned with anything sensible or empirical, although as we have seen it requires empirical matter for it to take place at all. This awareness is immediate intellectual consciousness. The representation "I think" should be able to accompany all representational activity, i.e., explicit self-perception must always be possible, but it does not ground this spontaneous self-perception. That it *can* accompany my representations does not mean it always does. Kant wrote that the transcendental unity of consciousness is *spontaneous* or self-active. Spontaneous synthetic activity is not dependent on a subject or an object because subject and object first come to be in and through spontaneous synthetic activity. As Fichte already wrote in the *Aenesidemus* Review: the faculty of representation exists only in and through itself, in other words: synthesis *precedes* thesis and antithesis.[50]

Yet when we try to "think the I" we quite naturally posit a subject of this activity. Indeed, for thought to exist there surely must be a being that exists? How can we understand spontaneous activity without this being the activity of someone? That is, how does one escape from the infinite regress discussed before? For Fichte spontaneous synthetic conscious activity results in the representation of objects (objects for us, we should always add). When we direct our attention to this process we are quite naturally

50 See J.G. Fichte RA 7 / 140. An insight, in fact, already found clearly expressed by Kant when he writes that the *synthetic* unity of apperception is the highest principle (KrV B 136) or that 'the *analytical* unity of apperception is only possible under the presumption of some *synthetic* one' (KrV B 133-134).

lead to grasp it as itself some sort of object (for thought). This "object" we take to be the *subject* of thought – a thinking subject. We ask: Who or what thing is it that thinks?[51] But this is quite mistaken. If thought is activity then we can only become aware of it in the very acting out of its activity. As we have seen above such awareness requires actual or completed consciousness. That is why Fichte asks us to think of one thing, and then of another:

> This agility [of thought] is intuited as a *process by means of which the active force wrenches itself away from a state of repose*, and it can be intuited in no other way (EK 531 / 116).[52]

We think of an object. When asked to think of another object we have to determine (*bestimmen*) this object for us. We wrench thought away from its resting-point in order to determine it anew. Thought is agility or a process that results in object-consciousness. Thought terminates in objects; it finds its *Bestimmung* (*terminus*, vocation, destination) there. Such object-consciousness Fichte names "concept" (*op. cit.* 533 / 118). Such use of this term might strike us as at odds with Kant but we should not forget that the German word here is *Begriff* which has an equally strong tactile connotation, namely of grasping something, holding on to something (*greifen*).[53] Fichte:

> A concept is never anything other than the very activity of intuiting – simply grasped, not as agility, but as a state of repose and determinacy (*loc. cit*).

51 See also the discussion at Ch. II, Sect. 2.4.
52 *Erste Kapitel* in *Sämmtliche Werke I,* translation "Chapter One" in *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre.* Abbr. to EK
53 For Kant of course the concept combines with intuitions to form a representation. Kant's distinction between intuition and concept as one of content and form is reformulated by Fichte, not as content external to form but as a determined-pole and a determining-pole. What is determined is then "grasped" by consciousness in the form of a concept or *Begriff*.

When we ask “Who or what is it that is thinking?” we confuse the process with the result of the process. It is this confusion once again that caused Kant's embarrassment when he tried to formulate the difference between our knowledge or awareness of our self-active nature (apperception) and the knowledge or awareness of objects. Fichte:

> The concept of the I is the self-reverting activity, grasped as something stable and enduring; thus it is in this way that the I as active and the I as the object of my activity coincide (*ibidem*).[54]

We thus need to distinguish between the concept of the I (the representation “I think”) and the intuition of the I-as-activity. The concept of the I is the *result* of turning our attention to our own inner acting. We grasp consciousness (*wir greifen es*) as a concept (*Begriff*), as something stable and enduring, that is, as object-like. But this object-like consciousness is not exactly the same as the active I we experience. We can experience our inner acting and this is called intellectual intuition. The intuition of our own conscious activity is thus certainly a form of immediate awareness but when we translate such awareness into concepts we should be critical of the change this entails. What this means is that we can no longer assume the adequacy of the concept. This distinction between the immediacy of the awareness of activity and its translation into concepts is one of Fichte's key insights and it is this that helps us understand the difference between the absolute I and the limited I as found in the *Foundations*.[55]

54 “*Die in sich zurückgehende Thätigkeit als feststehend und beharrlich aufgefasst, wodurch sonach beides, Ich, als Thatiges, und Ich, als Objekt meiner Thätigkeit, zusammenfallen, ist der Begriff des Ich.*”

55 We will return to this in Ch. III, Sect. 2.4.

We have seen that Kant had not one but three different problems in mind when he forbade the notion of an intellectual intuition. The three problematic forms of intellectual intuition bring out the extent to which human understanding is dependent upon sense input, its discrete nature and the necessary distinction between it and its object. As we have seen Fichte's use of intellectual intuition does not conflict with any of these qualifications. Rather, the form of intellectual intuition as used by Fichte was one that Kant himself, perhaps unwittingly, made use of.

Fichte distinguishes between the determination of intuitions given to the senses from the awareness of this determination itself. The synthetic combination of sensible intuitions with the concepts of the understanding is the spontaneous work of consciousness. The awareness of this spontaneous activity was not properly distinguished by Kant from the awareness of objects. But Fichte showed that such awareness is possible because it concerns an attentiveness to the proper functioning of consciousness itself. Such attentiveness he named intellectual intuition. The spontaneity of consciousness signals the immediacy of consciousness, and awareness of the spontaneous activity that is consciousness shows that not all consciousness is object-oriented.

However, as the attentive reader will have noted, there is some ambiguity to Fichte's use of intellectual intuition. On the one hand he appeals to an occasional awareness that appears in attentiveness to thought as an ongoing process, on the other hand he appeals to intellectual intuition as the necessary third component of complete consciousness. The latter use of intellectual intuition is in accord with Kant's transcendental apperception that makes that all representations are *my* representations

(KrV B 132). This, as Kant himself states in that same passage, can be given in an "*a priori* cognition". The former use is philosophically less robust. Could this not simply be an intuition of Kantian inner sense? We will have to hold-off this discussion until Chapter III, Sect. 3 when we will discuss in more detail the different ways in which Fichte uses the notion of intellectual intuition.

4. A programme for a philosophy of freedom

We have seen that there were three problems in the immediate reception of Kant's philosophy. These concern the status of the thing in itself, the necessity of a proof for transcendental philosophy and a demand for a deduction from first principles. These three problems are all intimately related and in the *Aenesidemus* we have seen that Fichte felt he had found an answer to these problems in the "for and through itself" nature of consciousness; a nature that should be understood as activity-like, rather than thing-like. In final section of this chapterI will formulate the ambitions and restraints of Fichte's project in light of these three problems. The resulting "programme" should then aid us in our reading of the *Foundations* in chapter II, which forms the core of our reading of Fichte. This programme is an interpretation on my part. Although there is encouragement in Fichte's own appeal to follow the "spirit" rather than "letter" of his thought I am aware that such an appeal on its own does not constitute an argument.[56] The merits of this reading will have to be born out by how it helps in understanding

56 See the long footnote to ZE 479n / 63n: "When one is unable to make satisfactory progress in one's interpretation by appealing to the *letter,* then one certainly has to interpret in accordance with the *spirit.*"

Fichte's project. But it will also be this programme that will let us juxtapose Fichte and Bergson. Situating both philosophers within a programme of a philosophy of freedom will allow for a "reciprocal determination" (Fichte) or "endosmosis" (a favourite term of Bergson) to take place and will point the way to an appreciation of ther relevance of both thinkers for us today.

4.1 Jacobi, Schulze and Reinhold once more

In the *Aenesidemus* we have seen how Fichte carefully positions himself in relation to Kant, Reinhold, Schulze, and Jacobi. The problem of the thing in itself, a proof for transcendental philosophy and a deduction from first principles, are interrelated and Fichte thought these could all be dealt with *mit einem Schlag*.

Schulze charged transcendental philosophy with question-begging. What kind of advance is it to posit some mysterious unifying capacity (*Vermögen*) to explain the possibility (*Möglichkeit*) of unified experience? What do we gain thereby? How can we show that the transcendental conditions really are the conditions for experience? The question, we may say, is, how do we show that what is conditioned (*das Bedingte* / empirical experience) is only possible under that which conditions (*die Bedingung* / transcendental conditions)? If B entails A this does not exclude that C entails A. Therefore, if we want a proof that A is only possible under B and that B is the *necessary* condition for A (and not merely one among several possible conditions), then we need to show that B is the only possible condition for A. This is achieved if we can show that not only does B entails A, but also that A entails B. If we can show that B is the

condition for A *and* that A is the condition for B then a necessary, hence truly *a priori,* relation between A and B has been established.

Jacobi's charge is related to Schulze's. He asked, what is this thing that both interacts with our senses and yet cannot be known by us? There is something out there that has an effect on us, but we can never know what this thing is. What good is our knowledge if it we can never know that it is about *this* world? Kant had shown what the conditions for our limited, *human,* form of experience were, but how are we to know that these are not merely *contingent* conditions? Even if we grant that they are necessary conditions for *our* form of experience, this does not exclude the possibility that *all our knowledge* might be inadequate. As he later came to formulate it in his influential *Letter to Fichte* (1799) does this not commit us to *nihilism?* Jacobi felt that philosophy had lost itself in a merely empty game of concepts, a world of phantoms and that we had lost "the true itself."[57] We see then that although the motivation is different the effect of Jacobi's charge amounts to the same as Schulze's: we need to demonstrate more clearly how and why the transcendental and the empirical hold together.

Reinhold, finally, felt that Kant's philosophy lacked coherence. What is the relation between practical and theoretical philosophy? How do freedom and necessity hold together? Should we not look for a unified point from which the two branches may be seen to originate? If transcendental philosophy is not grounded, then how could we ever be sure of it? This ground, Reinhold felt, had to lie the principle of representation. It is in representation that the subject and the object are related and

57 J.H. Jacobi "Letter to Fichte" in E. Behler ed., *Philosophy of German Idealism* (New York: Continuum, 1987), Translated by D.I. Behler, 130. Of course Jacobi's religiously inspired desire for truth is very different from Schulze's skepticism, still the ground for both concerns lay in the perceived ideality of the phenomenal world.

distinguished. But how exactly distinguishing and relating hold together Reinhold was unable to show.

4.2 A proof for transcendental philosophy

These three problems Fichte thought he could address through an analysis of the "for and through itself" nature of consciousness. Furthermore, consciousness had to be understood, not as thing-like, but as activity-like. Finally, this self-positing activity is synthetic, but synthetic in such a way as to precede thesis and antithesis. This self-positing synthetic activity was given the name *Tathandlung*. These were the hints from his *Review of Aenesidemus*. And we have already seen some of the things this entails. A *Tathandlung,* I claimed, has a rather unique relation to its conditions. This I have tried to clarify through the notion of "performance". A performance can both be understood as the result of the specific acts that are undertaken and as being simultaneous with these acts. Hence it is always actual and never abstract. The conditions and what is conditioned entertain an intrinsic relation. Second, as the analysis of the notion of intellectual intuition has shown, we cannot, without contradiction, abstract the synthetic act of consciousness from what this act is about. Kant was wrong when he considered the possibility of immediate awareness of consciousness in abstraction from what consciousness is about. Consciousness is not a spatio-temporal object that could be given in a quasi-empirical intellectual intuition, rather, consciousness is synthetic activity and awareness of this is only possible in the actual execution of such activity. We thus need to consider "completed consciousness" and not consciousness in separation from its *Stoff*.

What Fichte now had to show was how a transcendental *synthetic* act entails *by itself* a *separation* of subject and object and yet that both can only appear at the same time or in reciprocal determination. If this could be shown then a causally effective yet unknown thing in itself would have become an impossibility because as soon as we posit a thing we also posit consciousness. Since both object and subject appear at the same time, the one being what the other is not (the limited not-I and limited I of the *Foundations*) they are necessarily in relation to each other. Our knowledge is not an appearance of something wholly unconnected to it but it is a determination of what is radically different from ourself. This alterity is no longer conceptualised by Fichte as a static barrier but as an ever changing limit (we could say as a "horizon") between ourself and the world. We strive to determine the not-I and to the extent that we determine it, the not-I becomes an I, that is, it becomes part of our world. But since it denotes a limit and not a thing (an Ideal), the not-I as not the same as the I, i.e., in its undetermined state, it remains what is not the I. This is what the *Foundations* set out to demonstrate. If we could show that the subject always appears *with* the object then the problem of the thing in itself will have been removed.

In doing so we also provide a *proof* of transcendental philosophy. What it would effectively show is that the separation of an empirical subject and an empirical object, or between a limited I and limited not-I is itself a necessary condition of transcendental synthesis. The duality of I and not-I assumes original synthesis, and original synthesis assumes a duality of I and not-I. This entails a circularity but in the frank manner typical of him Fichte said such circularity was inevitable and had better be made

explicit rather than covered over. The foundation, then, is not of a ground and that what is constructed upon it, but rather, it entails a reciprocity of two components.[58]

4.3 Dogmatism and idealism

Fichte's ambition to ground transcendental philosophy lets us develop a claim that was made in the Introduction. There I stated that one of the aims of this thesis was to demonstrate "freedom" as a superior starting point. The problem is that a philosophy of freedom and determinism, or, as Fichte was wont to call them, idealism and dogmatism, seems to lead to a deadlock. Determinism attempts to explain the world through the necessary interaction of mind-independent things. Idealism, understood as a philosophy of freedom, claims an irreducible and spontaneous act of synthesis by consciousness. Hence the one seems to be denying the very basis of the other and each appears to be sufficient onto itself. A way to overcome this deadlock would be if we where to demonstrate that "freedom" accounts for both the reality of freedom *and* for the phenomena as claimed by determinism. Freedom would then no longer be equivalent but different, but it would include the other perspective. As Bergson notes in his *Lectures on Fichte,* Fichte had found a way in Kant to reconcile the exactness (*justesse*) of the arguments of the determinists with the existence of freedom. However, Kant's philosophy was still insufficiently systematic. As Reinhold said, it lacked a united origin, and this is what Fichte set out to demonstrate. Although Kant did not recognise

58 Hence I would agree with Daniel Breazeale that the circularity of the argument, rather than denying foundationalism, constitutes a form of foundationalism. See his very instructive article "Circles and Grounds in the Jena Wissenschaftslehre," in *Fichte: Historical Contexts / Contemporary Controversies* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1994), 43-70. For an anti-foundationalist account see Tom Rockmore, "Antifoundationalism, Circularity, and the Spirit of Fichte," in the same collection, 96-112. Also of interest is Alain Perrinjacquet, "Some Remarks Concerning the Circularity of Philosophy and the Evidence of Its First Principle in the Jena Wissenschaftslehre," in the same. We will return to this question in more detail in Ch. III, Sect. 2.

himself in the *Wissenschaftslehre,* Bergson, for one, feels that the impression that he has of Kantianism is "*assez conforme*" with Fichte's conception of transcendental philosophy (FCI, 158-9).

A philosophy that starts with spontaneity or freedom as a first principle and that desires to claim superiority over determinism will have to show the following:

> (1.) *If determinism, in starting with the interaction of things as found in experience, is unable to account for the unity of experience and for a real and active principle of freedom, can we then, starting exactly with such unity and with a real principle of freedom, account for the necessity of this "thing" from within our philosophy?*

In the *First Introduction* Fichte writes that if philosophy is the attempt to explain the possibility of experience then ultimately there are only two philosophical systems possible: one that starts from "the thing" and one that starts from the "I". Either all experience finds its ground in something that lies outside of consciousness, in what is ultimately the thing in itself, or at least in part it finds its ground in the I or in consciousness. These two systems he names dogmatism and idealism respectively (EE 426 / 11). The one system cannot refute the other because they do not agree on first principles. According to the dogmatist everything that happens in consciousness is ultimately the product of the interaction of things. This means that even the acts we consider as free result from this interaction. Hence Fichte concludes that dogmatism = materialism = fatalism (*op. cit.,* 430-31 / 16).

The idealist accounts for experience differently. For the idealist experience has its ground in the spontaneity of consciousness. A real and existing thing in itself, a thing in itself existing outside of a relation to consciousness is a noumenon, something we think in order to understand experience but which does not provide a ground for experience. For there to be intelligible experience and not a mere aggregate of the sensible manifold an act of synthesis is required. As Kant had said "all manifold of intuition has a necessary relation to the *I think* in the same subject in which this manifold is to be encountered" (KrV B 132). Only with such a relationship established does the notion of an independently existing thing first become thinkable. For the idealist the object of experience can never be self-grounding. Hence the idealist denies the very basis of dogmatism and the dogmatist denies the basis of idealism. Equally any attempt to combine the two positions is bound to fail. Fichte:

> Anyone who wishes to challenge this claim must establish the possibility of such a combination, a combination that presupposes a continuous transition from matter to mind or *vice versa*, or (what amounts to the same thing) a continuous transition from necessity to freedom (EE 431 / 16-17).

Ultimately it comes down to what Fichte calls a "choice" because there is no more profound position or higher principle from which to argue for the one over the other. This choice, Fichte writes, is bound up with an interest in oneself, or with the kind of person one is (*op. cit.,* 434 / 20). It is bound up with the undeniable experience of freedom. The experience of one's own freedom rebels against its reduction to a mere illusion arising from the interaction of things. I have an immediate awareness of freedom and this is what initially leads me to posit it as a first principle.[59] This is to

59 Strictly speaking this intuition of freedom is not the same as the intuition of spontaneous transcendental activity. This point cannot yet be developed here. We will return to this point in

contradict the dogmatist who claims there is no such direct experience of the freedom of the self. In the last instance the choice between such irreducible principles is based on the experience of freedom. Because such an experience can never be forced on someone we will have to accept that not everyone will be convinced of the superiority of this philosophy.

But beneath this *ad hominem* argument we may find another argument. Although Fichte writes that we cannot go from necessity to freedom, we might ask whether it is possible to go from freedom to necessity and it is here that we start to understand the stakes of the Fichtean philosophy as formulated above. If we cannot demonstrate the reality of freedom from the perspective of the thing in itself, can we perhaps demonstrate the necessity of the thing from the perspective of real freedom? If the perspective of freedom allows us to understand the thing, not as mere illusion or simple appearance but as a necessary condition of freedom itself then such a philosophy would be of superior strength because it would be able to explain *more* than its adversary. Whereas a system of determinism can only ever allow for freedom as mere epiphenomenon, as supervenient quality, but never as real, active and productive freedom, our philosophy of freedom would be able to explain both freedom and necessity.

4.4 Fichte contra Schelling

As we read in the quote above Fichte in fact *denies* the possibility of a continuous transition from freedom to necessity. Yet I propose to read this passage against the explicit intentions of the author. The most important reason to do so is that it will allow

Ch. III, Sect. 3.

us to understand his project all the better and I will discuss this presently. However, to separate the letter from the spirit of this argument we also need to know a bit more about the precise context of this passage. As Reinhard Lauth has shown, the *Attempt* is in direct discussion with Schelling.[60] At this point Fichte and Schelling were still entertaining amiable relations. Schelling understood himself as a mere expositor of the Fichtean doctrine, and to a large extent Fichte agreed on this. Schelling had just published his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795/96) in which he had defended the irreconcilable nature of dogmatism and criticism (*viz* idealism). Schelling, in fact, had reworked Salomon Maïmon's distinction, which was not a distinction between transcendental and non-transcendental approaches to philosophy but rather between different metaphysical principles.[61] Although the young Schelling used nearly exactly the same language as Fichte his ambitions from the outset were very different from Fichte's. In a letter written as early as February 4th, 1795 he wrote to his friend Hegel that since for God no object existed whatsoever (God being the absolute totality), we needed to strive to "destroy" our personality to thus pass unto the "absolute sphere of Being" and thence approach "immortality".[62] Schelling's problem, we could say, concerns man's original state of sin and the desire to unity with God. Dogmatism and criticism, according to Schelling, differed only in their approaches to attain the Absolute[63] and could therefore be seen as united in a higher metaphysical principle.[64] Because Schelling's philosophy was growing in popularity Fichte felt the

60 See Lauth 1975, 37-51.
61 See also Breazeale's "Editor's Introduction" to *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, xxiii ff. Compare also with Kant KrV A 92 / B 124-5 : "There are only two possible cases in which synthetic representation and its objects can come together, necessarily relate to each other, and, as it were, meet each other. Either if the object alone makes the representation possible, or if the representation alone makes the object possible."
62 Schelling as quoted in Lauth 1975, 18.
63 Lauth *op. cit.* 37.
64 *Op. cit.,* 38.

need to clearly distinguish his *transcendental* philosophy from Schelling's *metaphysical* one.

Schelling had written that the choice between the two approaches to the Absolute depended on a "practical imperative".[65] Fichte paraphrases Schelling when he writes that it depends on the kind of person one is, but for him the two alternatives are not of equal worth. Although one can start philosophy with either a dogmatic or with a idealistic *Erklärungsgrunde* or metaphysical principle, this does not by itself entail the equal possibility for constructing either a dogmatic/realistic system or a critical/idealistic system (see Fichte ZE 483n / 68n).[66]

4.5 The dual series of consciousness

That Fichte thought that the two philosophies were not simply irreducible and hence of equal status, but that a philosophy of freedom provided a superior viewpoint may be deduced from the following statement a bit further on in the *First Introduction*:

> When the intellect is posited to exist as an intellect, then that for which it exists is already posited along with it (EE 436 / 21).[67]

Fichte writes that when we posit actual intellect, which refers to the spontaneous act of synthesis, then this *by itself* entails a relation to that "for which it exists". This, he claims, is not the case when we posit a self-existing thing. That is because the idealist always posits a *double* series, whereas the dogmatist can only posit a single series. The idealist posits both a "series of being" ("existence as intellect") and a "series of

65 *Op. cit.,* 43.
66 See also Lauth *op. cit.,* 45-6.
67 *Durch ihr Gesetztseyn, als Intelligenz, ist das, für welches sie sey, schon mit gesetzt.*

observing" ("what is posited along with it"), or again, a "real series" (existence for itself) and an "ideal series" (existence for another) (*loc. cit.*). These two series are always indivisibly present in the intellect. But when the dogmatist posits a self-existing thing then he only posits a single series of merely posited being. This is because the thing can only exist for another and never be said to exist for itself.

For Fichte consciousness, as *spontaneous* activity, exists immediately, or "for itself". This immediate existence includes that which exists for consciousness (the "ideal series"). What does consciousness mean here? Consciousness is the capacity for a transcendental synthesis of intuitions and concepts. This synthesis of intuitions and concepts, which results in an object of experience, therefore exists for consciousness. Without this synthesis of intuitions and concepts there would not be anything to combine, hence no transcendental I. Therefore, once consciousness as transcendental synthesis is posited, *that for which it exists* (i.e., intuitions combined with concepts) is posited along with it. The idealist therefore *can* show the transition from being to representation, whereas the dogmatist only has being and cannot show how representation appears (*op. cit.*, 436-437 / 22-23). Idealism is thus a superior starting point.

In Section 3.2 above we discussed how empirical intuition is only possible together with intellectual intuition. As Kant wrote in KrV B 422n we need to posit some "stuff" for the "I think" to take place. This is because transcendental synthetic activity consists of combining empirical intuitions and concepts. Fichte claims the same when he writes:

> I cannot discover myself to be acting without also discovering some object upon which I act (ZE 464 / 47).

To return to our first formulation (see Sect. 4.3 above) of the stakes of Fichte's programme for a philosophy of freedom, if the transcendental unity of apperception is a necessary condition of experience, we now see that such apperception, if actual, must entail some *Stoff* as given to it. How precisely this is supposed to work and what else it entails is not determined thereby, but a nucleus of an answer now starts to appear.

4.6 The absolute I and the limited I and limited not-I

What is this "thing" Fichte refers to and how does a philosophy of freedom propose we demonstrate its reality? Kant had shown that the objects of experience are empirically real yet transcendentally ideal (KrV A 28 / B 44). This means that in my everyday empirical experience I am confronted with objects that seem to exist in complete independence from me, but which from a transcendental perspective I know to partially result from my own activity. Now, where empirical reality and transcendental ideality are commonly said to apply to the object of experience, Fichte claimed this also applies to the *subject* of experience. Fichte distinguishes between transcendental activity on the one hand and an empirical object of experience *and* an empirical *subject* of experience on the other hand. Transcendental activity does not only result in an object of experience but such an object always and only ever appears *with* the subject of experience. This distinction is operative in the *Foundations* but is found more explicitly on page 1 of the Introduction to *The System of Ethics* (1798):

> As soon as any actual consciousness occurs, even if it is only the consciousness of ourselves, the separation [between subject and object] ensues. I am conscious of myself only insofar as I distinguish myself, as the one who is conscious, from me, as the object of this consciousness (SS 1 / 7).[68]

Fichte wanted to deduce the role and place of both the thing in itself and the object of experience from within the conditions of consciousness itself. The way this is done is that even the (empirical) consciousness I have of myself entails both a fundamental distinction with *and relation to* my awareness of an object. Further on in the same Introduction he writes:

> I do not know without knowing *something*. I do not know anything about myself without becoming something for myself through this knowledge - or, which is simply to say the same thing, without separating something subjective in me from something objective. As soon as consciousness is posited, this separation is posited; without the latter no consciousness whatsoever is possible (*op. cit.,* 5 / 10).

In the *Foundations* Fichte distinguishes between an absolute I on the one hand, and a limited I and limited not-I on the other hand.[69] This limited I and limited not-I we could say are the subject and object of experience. The absolute I is the spontaneous transcendental activity that Kant had posited as the irreducible ground of experience. Because it cannot be reduced to a more fundamental principle and because this principle is said to be self-active, Fichte calls this the "first, absolutely unconditional principle" (GWL 91 / 93). This is also the principle of "self-positing" and Fichte first calls it an absolute subject (*op. cit.,* 97 / 98) and then absolute I (*op. cit.,* 109 /109). The use of the term "I" or "subject" was to prove somewhat ill-fated, leading to

68 *System der Sittenlehre* in *Sämmtliche Werke IV*; translation in *idem., The system of ethics,* trans. Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005) Abbr. to SS.

69 Fichte opposes an *unendliches und unbeschränktes Ich* to an *enliches und beschränktes Ich* in GWL 255 / 225-6.

accusations of having posited a solipsistic and world-creative individual and later on Fichte will abandon these terms. But when he speaks of an absolute I this should not be understood as some kind of absolute individual (hence the inadequacy of current translations with “ego”) but as an I in the sense of Kant’s I of the I think.

When in Part I of the *Foundations* Fichte will speak of an I and a not-I this is something more rudimentary than a subject and an object. What Fichte tries to make clear is how when taking “determination” as a “spontaneous activity” this by itself entails a determinant pole and a determinate pole. When he will write that “consciousness” splits into an I and a not-I, he is not thinking of an opposition of an internal and subjective I versus an external and objective not-I, nor does this concern subjectivity qua sens of self and objectivity qua object-consciousness, but first and foremost the question of how to understand *mere oppositionality*. What is unique about Fichte’s effort is that he squarely places the problem of the comportment or *Verhältnis* of a passive and an active pole before the question of the (intentional) relation or *Beziehung* of subject and object.

Fichte himself clearly distinguishes between his use of I and not-I from that of a subject and an object (GWL 189 / 173). All translations of Fichte that overlook this and translate I with “ego” or “self” thus greatly alter the argument.[70] Fichte defends his use of *Ich* over *Selbst* in a footnote to “Chapter One”. The concept of a “self”, he writes, signifies “a relationship to something that has *already been posited*. (…) Hence the word “self” presupposes the concept of the I” (EK 530 / 155, emp. added). The I refers explicitly to Kant’s transcendental unity of the apperception and does not contain any

70 DiGiovanni in his translation of RA translates “Ich” with “ego” and Heath and Lachs in their translation of the *Foundations* translate it with "self".

psychological or individual qualities. Because of this all translations of *Ich* have been modified to *I*.

When Fichte will try to deduce the role and place of the thing from the conditions of freedom itself, this "thing" becomes the empirical field of a subject of experience in relation to, and separation from, an object of experience. And this indeed is the problem the *Foundations* was trying to address. The task for a philosophy of freedom can now be formulated more precisely:

> *(2.) If the absolute I, as transcendental spontaneity, is a necessary condition for the empirical relations of a subject and an object of experience (limited I and limited not-I), can we now show how such a subject and such an object, standing in relations of reciprocal determination, are themselves necessary conditions for such real and productive freedom?*

II. THE SELF-POSITING I

1. Introduction: The project of the *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*

1.1 Jena

In 1794 Fichte was unexpectedly offered Reinhold's chair in Critical Philosophy at the prestigious University of Jena. Although this was a wonderful offer for a philosopher without any prior post at a university, it did mean he had to drastically foreshorten his project of elucidating the new philosophical starting-point he had discovered in the *Aenesidemus*. Indeed he tried to persuade the university to agree to a later start date on the grounds that it would not be appropriate to commence this professorship without having his own well-thought-through philosophy to lecture on.[1] However, he was in no position to negotiate and gratefully accepted the offer.

In late winter and early spring of 1794 Fichte lectured to friends and associates on what he now started to call the *Wissenschaftslehre*. This term is somewhat difficult to translate. *Wissenschaft* nowadays means science, but the whole notion of science has undergone dramatic changes in the two centuries since then. *Lehre* means teachings or doctrine. Rather than doctrine of science, Bergson proposes theory of science, in the

1 See Breazeale "Editor's Introduction", WLnm, 3.

sense of theory meaning contemplation (FCI, 158). *Wissenschaft* referred to that knowledge that is certain and so we could translate *Wissenschaftslehre* with epistemology. This term is actually of a later date. More correct would be to translate it with transcendental philosophy.[2] Transcendental philosophy asks after the conditions for synthetic *a priori* knowledge, that is, sure and certain knowledge about the world, or *Wissenschaft*.[3]

Fichte decided to lecture on his own work but due to a lack of time he ended up writing this work simultaneously with the lectures themselves. This "manuscript for his listeners" is what comprises the *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*. Combined with the printing techniques of the day it meant he had to bring the instalments to the printers as soon as he had finished them in order that they could be distributed on time. Fichte was thus unable to first think through the whole project but literally wrote it down as it came to him. Clearly then these are not the best circumstances to formulate what is ultimately a very original piece of work. These conditions may explain the often harsh judgments made of it. Even the English translators seem to display no pity for its author. They feel the book is riddled with “[b]ad punctuation, idiosyncratic sentence structure, and a dismaying over-abundance of non-functional expletives. … In addition, [Fichte] can be infuriatingly careless and inconsistent in his views. … [H]is arguments frequently seem shallow and verbal. … [And] his syntheses … turn on what appear to be forms of obscure linguistic sleight of hand.”[4] Part of this, I think may be explained by the historical circumstances as outlined above and partly by

2 This is also the opinion of Bergson, see FCI, 158, and Breazeale, see e.g. the title he gives to the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*: Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy.

3 The Zurich lectures aside Fichte also published *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre or of So-called Philosophy* just prior to arriving in Jena. This short text is rather *about* the WL, as Breazeale points out, than being a presentation of it, see Breazeale, "Editor's Introduction", WLnm, 4.

4 "Translators' Preface" to *The Science of Knowledge,* vii-viii.

Fichte's own rather impatient nature; more inclined to rewrite the *Wissenschaftslehre* in its entirety than improve upon an existing version.[5] However, the *Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre* and the *Attempt at a New Presentation* aside, both of which are either about the WL or are only a part of it, the *Foundations* remains the only version of the *Wissenschaftslehre* to be allowed, and to remain, in print (with a second edition in 1801). It is the piece of theoretical writing that was by far to be the most influential in the reception of Fichte's philosophy.

1.2 A foundation for transcendental philosophy

A philosophically more relevant reason for the lack of appreciation by the translators *et alia* might stem from the nature of the project itself. As we have seen in the first chapter Fichte tried to navigate a number of issues arising from Kant's transcendental philosophy. I will discuss these briefly once more in order for us to appreciate in what sense Fichte sought to provide a foundation for transcendental philosophy.

As he writes a few years later in the *Second Introduction* it is not really the case that the *Critique of Pure Reason* lacks a foundation as such, but that "nothing has been constructed upon it, and the construction materials - though already well prepared - are jumbled together in a most haphazard fashion" (ZE 479n / 63n). What needs to be done is to *systematise* transcendental philosophy. "Kant has by no means *proven* that the categories he has postulated are the conditions for the possibility of self-consciousness, but he has merely asserted that this is so. Nor has he provided any derivation

5 At least up to 1804 Fichte explicitly entertained the idea to supplant this presentation of his work that was also seen by him as inadequate with one that would be able to present it as a whole. See Breazeale, *op. cit.,* 31.

whatsoever of space and time and of what fills them both and is *inseparable* from them within original consciousness" (*op. cit.,* 478 / 62, emphasis Fichte's).

> [Therefore], the philosopher must first show how the I exists and comes into being for itself. Secondly, he must show that this being of the I for itself would not be possible unless a being outside of the I also arose for that I at the same time (*op. cit.,* 458 / 41).

Which again means that

> [T]he assumption that objects exist outside of and quite independent of us [i.e., realism], *is contained within idealism itself* (...) Indeed, it is the sole aim of all philosophy to provide a derivation of objective truth (*op. cit.,* 455n / 38n, emp. added).

Starting from transcendental spontaneous synthesis as first principle (= the absolute I), we need to derive objective truth. This is done by demonstrating that an I can only ever appear with a not-I, or again, that "that which fills time and space" is *inseparable* from "original consciousness", indeed, is a *condition for* self-consciousness. Although we will "start with" the absolute I, or with "self-positing" as first principle, objective truth considered in its most primary aspect as a mere oppositionality of an I and "that which is outside the I", or a “limited I” and a “limited not-I”, must be shown to be both conditioned by self-positing and a condition for self-positing. The "for and through itself" nature as first discovered in the *Aenesidemus* thus contains a number of relations that in fact ring very close to Reinhold's principle of consciousness:

> In consciousness representation is distinguished through the subject from both object and subject and is referred to both.

"In consciousness representation is distinguished through the subject ..." Transcendental philosophy must provide a deduction of the possibility of knowledge from within our already limited and determined experience. All we have access to is experience as it is *for us*. This is a circle we cannot escape from.[6] What we have is representation, which is always already partly of our own making. It is we as subjects that distinguish within our consciousness between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*.

"...[R]epresentation is distinguished ... from both object and subject and is referred to both." Representation is both *what appears before* me, the *Vorstellung* itself, and that it appears *before me* (*Vor-stellung*). I only ever come into being in and through the representation of something outside of me, i.e., in distinction with something that is not me. The representation is not me, yet it is mine. My representation may be distinguished from a (philosophically) possible thing in itself.

In our discussion of the *Foundations* we will see that Fichte must navigate two conflicting demands: On the one hand I and not-I must be understood to appear genetically connected or in “reciprocal determination”: the I is what the not-I is not. *And* I and not-I must be understood as truly different, that is *qualitatively* different, and not merely *quantitatively* different. In fact, although this will only become apparent after our discussion of the *Foundations*, a similar problem holds for the first principle of the absolute I and the connected *limited* I and not-I. These two sides must be understood to be finally only different aspects or points of view (of philosophy / the

6 See also Breazeale, 1994, 47.

transcendental and of life / the empirical, see ZE 455n, 483n / 38n, 68n), yet cannot and should not be conflated either.

2. The first principle of the absolute I

2.1 In search for a *Tathandlung*

In the first section of the *Foundations* Fichte sets out to find the first, absolutely unconditioned principle (*erster, schlechthin unbedingter Grundsatz*). As a first principle there are certain demands that must be met. Obviously, it must be something we cannot think without, i.e., it must be necessary. It must be something *simple*, i.e., not composed of parts as was Reinhold's principle of representation, because then we may assume that the parts are prior to the principle and hence the principle a derivative one and not a grounding one. It must, Fichte says, be *discovered* and not constructed (GWL 91 / 93): as a first principle it cannot be derived from any other, and it cannot be invented or constructed because then it would not be an absolute principle. But when we discover it as intrinsically certain, and as that which we cannot do without, we will be certain to have found our first principle. Immediately Fichte gives us the main qualification for our principle: it must express an *act* that does not appear among the data of empirical consciousness, but first makes it possible (*loc. cit.*). This *act* is a *Tathandlung*.

2.2 From "A=A" to "I=I"

Now, so as to discover this first principle, Fichte proposes we start, quite unassumingly, with the "perfectly certain" truth of the proposition "A = A" (*op. cit.,* 93 / 94). The

proposition “A = A” means that if A is true, then A must be A and this retains its truth-value no matter what reduction we may perform. The connection between A and A is necessarily true even without knowledge of the existence of A. We can posit this relation between A and A under all conditions. Fichte proposes we call this relation “X”. If we can posit this relation after the reduction of all objects then it cannot find its ground in any object. If it cannot find its ground in experience it must be ascribed to consciousness. The existence of X is therefore a “fact [*Tatsache*] of consciousness” (94 / 96). This is in keeping with a Cartesian reduction: I can perform a reduction of all objects given to the understanding but a certain logical structure still remains comprehensible.[7] As X must be posited in the I, it thus asserts a necessary relation between “an unknown positing of A [as subject] and an absolute assertion of that same A [as predicate]” (*ibid.*). The relation between A and A is a necessary one. Fichte then concludes:

> X is possible only in relation to an A; now X is really posited in the I: and so A must also be posited in the I, insofar as X is related to it (*ibid.*).

This supplementary step is perhaps not crucial to his overall argument, but it is doubtful nonetheless. Fichte construes identity as self-relation. From this relation “A = A” he subsequently abstracts the *relata* to retain the pure form of the relation. This relation is true *by definition* but Fichte then wants to conclude that, insofar as this relation is necessarily true, so must that which first makes it possible also be true. The relation cannot exist without the *relata*, hence the *relata* must also necessarily exits. He

7 For an exploration of the relation of Fichte to Descartes see Alexis Philonenko, “De la présupposition chez Descartes et Fichte” and “Une lecture fichtéenne du cartésianisme n'est-elle pas nécessaire?,” both in *idem., Le transcendantal et la pensée moderne* (Paris: P.U.F, 1990).

thus transposes the certainty of the relation to that of the *relata*. Even if Fichte adds the condition that this is true only to the extent that "X is related to it" one still cannot escape the feeling that Fichte is trying to have his cake and eat it. However, as will become apparent in a little while, although it appears as though Fichte is trying to deduce the subject and object of consciousness from "A = A", this ultimately is not the case. Again, in keeping with Cartesianism, in the reduction we do not deduce consciousness, but consciousness is *what remains*. In fact, the "A = A" functions as a heuristic device intended to bring the reader to reflect on the possibility condition for *any possible* judgment.[8] This condition, of course, is consciousness.

Fichte claims to have derived at least the "fact" of consciousness from the necessity of this relation of "A = A". As the relation itself is necessarily true and cannot be ascribed to any objective state of the world, then, by default it must be ascribed to consciousness. The necessary relation of "A = A", Fichte writes, is equal to the relation "I = I" (94 / 96). Yet it differs from "A = A" in that the truth of "A = A" is dependent upon a possible demonstration of the truth (or existence) of A (as subject), whereas we have seen that, to the extent that the relation X is posited the "I am" (as a mere fact of consciousness) must be posited too. When we now posit "I = I" we not only posit the necessary relation (= X) of I and I, but by positing this relation we have also posited the (existence of the) I, as that which makes this relation possible. We may therefore say that "I = I" is true, not only as to form (i.e., as identity), but also as to content (as self-relation). This truth is self-performative, or a *Tathandlung*: in positing the necessary relation of I to I, we immediately posited the existence of the I as only the I can allow for the possibility of the necessary self-relation.

8 In (105 / 105) Fichte speaks of "A=A" as an act of judgment.

2.3 The self-positing I or *Tathandlung*

The "deduction" of consciousness from "A = A" is not overly convincing, especially not if read *as* a deduction. But Fichte himself notes a bit further on that this is not the case, rather, "A = A" is possible only on the basis of the *I am* (98 / 99). The "A=A" is used as an example of something beyond doubt to show that what makes this judgment possible is consciousness (92 / 94). Hence it is "I am", understood as the fact of consciousness, that first makes this possible. Indeed, immediately after this passage Fichte offers what is in fact a *new* and independent argument for the existence of the *I am* (§1.6 and the remainder). Let us return to our point of departure, Fichte writes. "A = A" is a judgment. All judgment is an activity of the human mind. Then Fichte writes:

> The *I posits itself,* and by virtue of this mere self-assertion it *exists*; and conversely, the I *exists* and *posits* its own existence by virtue of merely existing. It is at once the agent and the product of the action; the active, and what the activity brings about; action [*Handlung*] and deed [*Tat*] are one and the same, and hence the "I am" expresses an Act [*Tathandlung*] (96 /98).[9]

This is not a further explication of the conclusion attained in §1.1 to §1.5 but a new and independent argument, even more so: the pivotal point of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. This fact, that Fichte introduces a new argument in the *Foundations* has, to my knowledge, not previously been noted in the literature.

When at §1.5 we came to the conclusion that, if "I = I" is posited, then so must be the *I am* and hence "I = I" is not only true *de jure* but also *de facto*, this was most

9 *"Das Ich* setzt sich selbst*, und es* ist*, vermöge dieses bloßen Setzens durch sich selbst; und umgekehrt: Das Ich* ist*, und es* setzt *sein Sein, vermöge seines bloßen Seins. – Es ist zugleich das Handelnde, und das Produkt der Handlung; das Tätige, und das, was durch die Tätigkeit hervorgebracht wird; Handlung, und Tat sind Eins und ebendasselbe; und daher ist das:* Ich bin *Ausdruck einer Tathandlung."*

certainly not established beyond all doubt. We may for instance ask what "I = I" is supposed to express. Is this an empirical statement? – one would not think so. If, then, it is a logical statement, the relation between the I of the "I = I" and the I of *I am* must first be demonstrated, because the *I am* is *not* a logical entity. What Fichte writes in the passage above is that, in relation to the I there is a strict equivalence between positing and existence. The I posits itself and in doing so it exists. It posits itself *because* it exists. To exist as an I *means* to posit itself. As positing is *what it does,* and *what it is* results from it positing itself, Fichte can write that it is "*das Tätige"* ("the active") and "what is produced thereby".

2.4 The transcendental and the empirical, the phenomenal and the noumenal

With the equation of the existence of consciousness as activity and self-positing, or existence of the I and self-positing of the I, one might want to ask how this is at all possible? *Who* is it that posits itself? What was the I before it posited itself? To posit *itself* it must certainly already be in existence before it can posit anything? Does it not imply the existence of something prior to positing? Well, Fichte replies, *I* was not!: "ich *war gar nicht; denn ich war nicht Ich* (97 / 98). The "ich", as a personal I, is not "Ich", the transcendental I. Fichte writes that the objection implies "a confusion between the I as subject and the I as object of reflection for an absolute subject" (*ibid.*). What is this confusion between an I as subject and an I as object for an absolute subject? The absolute subject, as we know, is Fichte's term for the transcendental I or for the transcendental synthetic act of unification. This "I" must be presupposed prior to

empirical self-consciousness. Empirical self-consciousness always already entails a relation to an object of experience and can only be known in this way.

When we ask what the transcendental I is prior to (empirical) self-consciousness we effectively conflate the distinction between the transcendental and the empirical with the distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal. In our everyday experience the world appears as real and existing independently of us. This is the empirical perspective. But in order to understand the possibility of objectivity we must assume transcendental synthesis. From this transcendental perspective the object appears simultaneously with the subject. The transcendental perspective is nothing but a *philosophical reflection* on the conditions of possibility of the only experience that we have, the empirical. The transcendental perspective aims to elucidate this perspective, and does not intend to show some other, hidden world. For both Kant and Fichte the world as we know it in experience is really *there* (see e.g. the quotes from Sect. 1.2 above). The transcendental perspective does not show us some other, hidden world but is a philosophical reflection on the possibility of the only experience possible, which is *this* experience. Transcendental philosophy properly understood is not a Platonism.

However, transcendental philosophy can easily be misunderstood as Platonism and this happens when the above distinction is confused with another important Kantian distinction. When the transcendental-empirical distinction is confused with the phenomenal-noumenal distinction one might be lead to assume the possibility of some real world existing outside of its relation to us and philosophy as knowledge of this more real world. But this is to misconstrue the heuristic distinction of phenomena and noumena as an ontological one.

The phenomenal-noumenal distinction is introduced by Kant to bring out certain qualities of our human form of cognition. If we agree that knowledge and experience are not a direct representation of the world but works of self-legislation, then we may posit the possibility of a world *outside of any relation to us*. This world, a mere thought-world, is a noumenal world (KrV B 306). Although nothing can be said thereby (and hence the concept remains fully negative), we may understand that the object is not in any way created by us but is distinct from us. From this perspective our knowledge may now be said to pertain to *phenomena*, to be an appearance or *Erscheinung* of such noumena. But this is a transcendental distinction and not an empirical one. A world outside any relation to us would not make any sense to us. Kant neither affirms the existence of noumena, nor does he affirm that our knowledge is mere appearance. Empirically speaking our knowledge does not concern appearances, it is not a "shining on" (*Erscheinung*) a cave-wall of a more real reality outside of our limited minds. When the two distinctions are confused we are lead to think that, as there is a real existing thing in itself, as it were "beneath" our experience (a positive noumenon, KrV B 307), then there must also be an *I in itself* beneath experience. This leads us to ask what the I is *before* consciousness.

2.5 The I presents itself to itself

After having responded in the negative, Fichte then writes:

> The I presents itself to itself, to that extent it imposes on itself the form of a presentation, and is now for the first time a something, namely an object; in this form consciousness acquires a substrate, which exists (GWL 97 / 98).[10]

This sentence contains the entire *Wissenschaftslehre in nucce*. What it shows is that the self-positing I (i.e., the first principle), in positing itself (i.e., as actual spontaneous synthesis) is "present to itself", and that this self-presence must be understood as an immediate duality of that which is presented, or *Vor-gestellt,* and that to which it is presented, i.e. consciousness. Let us look at this sentence more closely.

The absolute I, or spontaneous transcendental synthesis, posits itself. It posits itself as transcendental activity, which is to say that it is properly *selbsttätig* or self-active. This absolute or self-active nature we have understood in its confrontation with determinism. It is self-active in that it cannot be reduced to the interaction of things but rather must be thought to (philosophically) precede objective experience. Considered as such, or *schlechthin*, it can thus be understood as *absolute*. As Fichte writes a bit further on (in §3): "The absolute I of the first principle is not *something* (it has, and can have, no predicate)" (GWL 109 / 109). This is because it precedes all determination. But considered in its "essence" ,or *Wesen.* it is self-positing (*op. cit.,* 97 / 98).

Yet as we have already seen in our discussion of intellectual intuition such transcendental activity cannot take place without some *Stoff* (see Ch. I., Sect. 3.2). It is absolute when considered *schlechthin*, or in itself, but it always "exists" in actual state. In this actual state it needs empirical intuitions, otherwise it would be "empty". Without empirical intuitions it would not be a *Handlung,* but a mere machine, the empty husk of a series of activities. Hence the absolute I exists only in completed consciousness. Only

10 *Das Ich stellt sich selbst vor, nimmt insofern sich selbst in die Form der Vorstellung auf, und ist erst nun etwas, ein Objekt; das Bewußtsein bekommt in dieser Form ein Substrat, welches ist.*

when all elements are in play, i.e., in the actual performance of consciousness, can I have an intuition of consciousness. Such intellectual intuition must therefore always be a possibility whenever I entertain representations.

The absolute I considered in actuality constitutes synthetic unity, which for Fichte consists of determination. Empirical intuitions are brought under concepts and this is a form of judgment or determination. Such determination results in a presentation (*Vorstellung*) but this entails an opposition between presentation and that to which it is presented: "*Das Ich* stellt *sich* vor*, …in die Form der* Vorstellung". Although we will turn to a discussion of the second and third principles of counterpositing and reciprocal determination in the next section, we may expect that counterpositing and reciprocal determination will appear simultaneously with the first principle of self-positing. In order to explain the first principle of self-positing Fichte is immediately forced to discuss a *bloßes* ("pure" or "naked") opposition of subject and object. Self-positing itself already contains counterpositing and such counterpositing must be understood as a reciprocal determination of both positing and counterpositing. The analysis as given here is a new interpretation of the *Foundations*.

3. The plurality and reciprocity of positing (§2 and §3)

In "Part I: Principles (*Grundsätze*) of the Entire *Wissenschaftslehre*" Fichte attempts to systematise transcendental philosophy in order to show that "self-positing" or consciousness entails subject-object distinction or materiality and that opposition

entails self-positing. At this point we are not concerned with subject-consciousness or with object-consciousness as such but something more rudimentary: a mere opposition of I and not-I. The more specific determination of subject and object is given in "Part II: The Foundation (*Grundlage*) of Theoretical Knowledge" and "Part III: The Foundation of Practical Science" (see Sect. 4 and 5 below). Here, at this stage of the *Foundations,* we are merely concerned with showing how "self-positing", "counterpositing" and "reciprocal determination" hold together. We have seen in §1 of the *Foundations* that self-positing entails opposition and a relation between opposites. This is what Fichte now attempts to exposit in systematic form.

3.1 Positing and Counterpositing

In §1 Fichte started with the proposition "A = A" in an apparent move to derive the first, absolutely unconditioned principle of self-positing. Working backwards to the conditions of the logical statement "A = A" we found that it is the *I am* on which the "A = A" is based. But in fact the *I am* is simply posited. In a similar way Fichte now attempts to demonstrate the principle of counterpositing (*Entgegensetzen*).

The proposition "~A is not equal to A" is, Fichte writes, of equal certainty as the proposition "A = A". If we would want to derive this proposition from within our system it could only be derived from "A = A". Yet this is not possible. For if "~A is not equal to A" were the same as "~A = ~A" then this could only mean that "*if* the opposite of A is posited, *then* it is posited" but this would be exactly the same as "A = A" and so we would not have derived anything new but we would have simply returned to our first principle (GWL 101-2 /102). As it cannot be derived from the first principle Fichte

concludes that the positing of ~A must simply be posited, *because* it posited (*loc. cit.*). To this conclusion drawn from the impossibility of deriving it from "A=A" Fichte then adds that, "as the proposition '~A is not equal to A' occurs among the facts of empirical consciousness", there must be a corresponding act (*Handlung*) of opposition present within the I (*ibid.*). But here too, we must conclude, contrary to how Fichte would like to present things, that matters are the other way around. There is first the "empirical fact" of counterpositing. Because this fact cannot be derived from our first principle of self-positing it too must simply or absolutely be posited: "~A is posited absolutely, *as* such, just *because* it is posited" (*ibid.*).

Although philosophically speaking this is not a very strong argument, Fichte does derive two interesting things from it. First, he says, positing and counterpositing assume the identity of the I (103 /103). If they were not present in the I or not present in the *same* I, i.e., if they were present in an opposable I, then counterpositing would not be opposed to the first positing, but we would simply have two unrelated instances of positing. For counterpositing to be an opposition to another positing both must be connected in their opposition. Now, the I is only and purely positing (§1), hence, if counterpositing is present in the I, then this too must be posited absolutely by the I (103/103). This means that counterpositing has a positive existence, because to posit something is for it to exist. Hence counterpositing is not negative but positive.

Counterpositing has a purely positive existence. Opposed to positing it is a negation, but considered as such, as positing, it is positive or does not entail absence. Secondly, for any ~A to be posited there must first be posited an A. The counterpositing of ~A is "materially conditioned" by the positing of A: ~A is what A is *not*. Without the

prior positing of A no counterpositing of ~A is possible. That is why counterpositing is the second principle. This material determination does not tell us what ~A is, it only tells us that it is not A. The act of counterpositing is hence only conditioned as to content, which for Fichte means that it is dependent upon the prior (material) positing of A.

As we know, self-positing entails opposition. What the two remarks by Fichte show is that this opposition should be thought of as one of two opposing positives or presences. Negation and affirmation are, as it were, both present. It is interesting to link this to an early an little known article by Kant, titled "An Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes" (1763).[11] In this article Kant discusses the notion of negative magnitudes to show that negation can only be a relative concept and never an absolute concept. Negation is dependent on a preceding affirmation and cannot be thought of in isolation without turning it into an affirmation. Fichte effectively claims the same. This is also one of the main philosophical arguments that Bergson uses in order to criticise other theories, as for instance in his critique of the notion of disorder and nothingness in *Creative Evolution*. We will discuss this at Ch. VI, Sect. 5.1.

Now that we have spoken of opposition as *bloßer Handlungart*, that is, considered as a "pure" form of positing, we may now, Fichte writes, "proceed to its outcome (*Produkte*) = ~A" (GWL 103 / 104). The subsequent passage is somewhat ambiguous and (overly) complicated but the distinction between "act" and "product" is interesting because it shows that for Fichte there is a difference between positing and counterpositing on the one hand, and between *that which* is posited and *that which* is

11 Immanuel Kant, "Attempt to introduce the concept of negative magnitudes into philosophy," in *Theoretical philosophy, 1755-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)

counterposited on the other: “[T]hat which is opposed to the I = the not-I” (104 / 104). Fichte writes that the act is contained "within" the I but that the result is opposed to it. The apparent contradiction that seems to result from this may be removed when we distinguish between positing as activity *schlechthin*, that is, in abstraction from its content, and positing as *determined* activity, which always entails opposition. Counterpositing *as form of positing* is “contained within the I”, that is, considered as such, or as absolute I. But in relation to what it is opposed to it is not-I. [12]

There is positing and counterpositing and this “results in”, or is the condition of possibility for, an I and a not-I. What makes this section confusing is that Fichte does not clearly distinguish the two aspects of the I. As positing, the “absolute I” is unconditioned or absolute. Counterpositing, again *as positing*, is also absolute, hence a second *Grundsatz*. But counterpositing as a relative concept already entails a prior positing (see its material determinacy). These together then make possible an opposing I and an opposing not-I.

“If I am to present anything at all, I must oppose it to the presenting I” (*ibid.*).[13]

I first have to oppose something to what is presenting (*der Vorstellenden*), only then can it be present to me (*kann ich es mir vorstellen*). The original difference between an I and a not-I can never be derived from experience because it first makes all experience possible. All other negation (including “~A is not equal to A”) first finds its ground in

12 This finds further confirmation in a sentence from §3, the emphasis is Fichte's: "Although in our second [principle] the *act of counterpositing* could not be deduced; were we however to posit it unconditionally as to its pure form we could rigorously prove that *what was counterposited* (das Entgegegengesetzte) must equal the Not-I" (105 / 105-6).

13 "*So wie ich irgend etwas vorstellen soll, muß ich es dem Vorstellenden entgegensetzen.*"

this difference between I and not-I. Therefore this is a second and independent principle.

3.2 Why nonetheless is it a secondary principle?

Yet if both self-positing and counterpositing are wholly positive then why is the one primary and the other secondary? Positing and counterpositing are relative terms, both are positive as acts of positing, both are contained within the same I, why then start with self-positing? But as we are beginning to see (we must wait for the third principle of reciprocal determination before the structure is complete), only with counterpositing do we first have things - things to be abstracted from - and with it the possibility of negation. That we start with *self*-positing means we start with an activity that is independent, that means *spontaneous,* activity. Spontaneous or self-active activity (*Selbsttätigkeit*) is positive because it is active in and of itself. This is first opposed by another equally positive form of action: counterpositing. With this positive activity first appears negation and abstraction. Although the resulting negation and abstraction are secondary they are essentially positive.[14]

3.3 Some reconstructive terminology

We have seen that consciousness is understood by Fichte as self-positing. It is self-positing in the sense of being a spontaneous, that is, self-caused act. And it is self-positing in that, in, as it were, *acting out* or actually performing the task of transcendental synthesis there results an opposition of presentation and that to which it

14 See Ch II. Sect. 2.1.

is presented, of not-I and I. In §2 of the *Foundations*, though it is more implicit than explicit, Fichte distinguished between two aspects of this opposition. First there is counterpositing as act; second, there is the result of counterpositing. What makes these sections hard to follow is that Fichte rarely differentiates his terms clearly. This will become all the more apparent in §3 of *Foundations* that we are about to discuss.

In order to reconstruct his argument we need to distinguish more clearly between a number of different senses of the I and not-I. These senses are implied by Fichte but not always indicated. There is the "absolute I", which is the act of transcendental synthesis (or determination), considered as such, as positing, or considered we could say "transcendentally". But often Fichte just speaks of this absolute I as simply I. Secondly there is counterpositing. This too can be considered as a form of positing, and is then said that the not-I is "contained within the I", contained within the *absolute* I that is. But there is also the "result" of counterpositing. Both the act and the result of counterpositing are generally referred to by Fichte as "not-I". Leaving aside for the moment the not-I as act, we should call the not-I-as-result a limited not-I. This relates to a final distinction that must be made between the I as self-positing (absolute I) and the I that appears as "result" of counterpositing, that is, an I that appears in reciprocal determination with a not-I. This I is sometimes referred to as limited I, but sometimes simply as I. Because this I always appears with a not-I both should be called limited I and limited not-I.

Because Fichte does not clearly distinguish between these senses he speaks of I and not-I as two forms of positing that are essentially the same, or "contained within the I", but also as fundamentally opposed: the not-I is what the I is not. That these are

two different cases is clear but Fichte's undifferentiated use of I and not-I does not always make this apparent. Although all this takes place within experience or “within the I”, I propose we speak of the latter instance as one of an opposition of a limited I, always in relation to a limited not-I, and the former instance as an opposition (but, as we will come to see, only a hypothetical one) of absolute I and absolute not-I. These distinctions should make the argument of the *Foundations* more clear.

3.4 The material principle (The third principle of reciprocal determination)

How do a (limited) I and (limited) not-I relate? This is what §3 tries to determine. Fichte writes:

> Insofar as the not-I is posited, the I is not posited; for the not-I completely nullifies the I. Now the not-I is posited *in the I*: for it is counterposited... (106 / 106)

This we may now understand to read as follows: insofar as something outside of me (=not-I) is posited, I am “nullified” or *aufgehoben*, since this not-I is what I am not. This not-I is thus a limited not-I and this I a limited I as the one entails the other. Yet the not-I is posited “in the I”, in the *absolute* I that is, because it is transcendental synthesis that is the condition for objectivity as such. Hence Fichte continues:

> ...but all such counterpositing presupposes the identity of the I, in which something is posited and then something set in opposition thereto (*loc. cit.*).

Counterpositing entails positing and both presuppose the "identity of the I". It is transcendental synthesis that makes all positing possible. This I is therefore the absolute I.

The problem this poses for Fichte is that if the absolute I posits a not-I within itself then it negates itself. Yet to even posit a not-I the absolute I has to posit itself. Part of the problem here results from an insufficient differentiation ofthe different senses of I and not-I. This then leads Fichte to think in quasi-spatial terms of an absolute I and a not-I as somehow "within" this I. But what is the philosophical problem that he is after?

The terms in which the problem is posed makes it hard to see what it is about. In §4 Fichte will rephrase the opposition of I and not-I and positing and counterpositing as one between activity and passivity. The (absolute) I is pure spontaneous activity. This activity consists of a determination (limitation) of something that is not I: empirical intuitions. These intuitions are a passivity of the subject. But the subject itself (consciousness) can only be seen as activity. The problem is, as Bourgeois states, "how can activity posit itself as passivity?".[15] Here, in §3 Fichte has not yet started to use these terms but still uses quasi-spatial terms to denote the (limited) I and (limited) not-I. How do they limit each other, he asks? “How can A and ~A, being and non-being, reality and negation, be thought together without mutual elimination and destruction?” (GWL 108 / 108). The answer comes quite easily: they mutually limit each other. The concept of limitation (*Einschränkung*) implies the two concepts of reality and negation. But if these were to be absolute reality and absolute negation then the one would negate the other. Hence through the notion of *divisibility* (*Teilbarkeit*), which is “the *capacity* [*fähigkeit*] *for quantity* in general, [and] not any *determinate* quantity” (*ibid.*),

15 Bourgeois 1995, 18.

we now have arrived at both a divisible I and a divisible not-I. Where at first we had an absolute I and an absolute not-I that were completely opposed to each other, we now have a divisible I and a divisible not-I. The not-I implies that "a measure of reality … is abolished in the self" (109 / 109). But this does not completely annul the I. In fact, only now can it be said that both are *something* (*Etwas*). The following passage is crucial:

> The absolute I of the first principle is not *something* (it has, and can have, no predicate); it is simply *what* it is, and this can be explained no further. But now, by means of this concept [i.e., divisibility], consciousness contains the *whole* of reality; and to the not-I is allotted that part of it which does not attach to the I, and *vice versa*. Both are something; the not-I is what the I is not and *vice versa*. As opposed to the absolute I (though – as will be shown in due course – it can only be opposed insofar as it is presented, not as it is in itself), the not-I is *simply nothing*; as opposed to the limitable I it is a *negative quantity*. (109-10 / 110)[16]

Again Fichte stresses the fact that the absolute I is not *something*, it is simply *what* it is. This *quidditas* must be understood as pure activity, something that is neither agent nor action yet contains them both. This absolute I divides and opposes itself. In this process it changes, it becomes a *something*. The absolute I, in dividing itself, "becomes" a limited I and limited not-I. Where the first principle pertains to the spontaneous, or self-grounding nature of consciousness, which is not a something and, preceding all determination, has itself no predicates, it is with the third principle that I and not-I first

16 *"Das absolute Ich des ersten Grundsatzes ist nicht* etwas *(es hat kein Prädikat, und kann keins haben,) es ist schlechthin,* was *es ist, und dies läßt sich nich weiter erklären. Jetzt vermittelst dieses Begriffs ist im Bewußtsein* alle *Realität; und von dieser kommt dem Nicht-Ich diejenige zu, die dem Ich nicht zukommt, und umgekehrt. Beide sind etwas; das Nicht-Ich dasjenige, was das Ich nicht ist, um umgekehrt. Dem absoluten Ich entgegengesetzt, (welchem es aber nur, insofern es vorgestellt wird, nicht insofern es an sich ist, entgegengesetzt werden kann, wie sich zu seiner Zeit zeigen wird) ist das Nicht-Ich* schlechtin Nichts*; dem einschränkbaren Ich entgegengesetzt ist es eine* negative Größe."

become something. Hence we may, with Schrader, call this principle the material principle.[17]

Through this division consciousness now contains the whole of reality (*alle Realität*). Before this division of the absolute I (it should not need noting that this is not a temporal sequence) it did not really exist, hence there is also no whole of reality. A whole of reality implies a limit to reality. Of this reality the not-I (as limited) is allotted what is not the I. This not-I is a something, a negative quantity. As was noted in §2 this only tells us what it is not, not what it *is*. We could say that this negative reality is what constitutes part of the objectivity of the world. The objectivity of the world entails that we can always find out more about the object; i.e., the object is never completely given.[18] Yet this is not an absolute nothing because in fact we can speak of this object that we will never completely know. If it were an absolute nothing or simply nothing (*schlechthin Nichts*) then we could not even say anything about it.

We thus attain the following schema:

- The not-I as opposed to the absolute I is “simply or absolutely nothing” and lies outside the whole of reality.
- The not-I as opposed to a limited I is a negative quantity and it is that within the whole of reality that is not the I.

The distinction parallels Kant's distinction of positive and negative noumena. An "absolute not-I " or a thing in itself that is said to exist outside of any relation to a

17 W. Schrader, *Empirisches und absolutes Ich. Geschichte des Begriffs Leben in de Philosophie J.G.Fichtes* (Stuttgart, 1972), p 52. See also GWL 123 / 120 where Fichte calls it "*den des Grundes*", "the *grounding* principle".

18 Compare with the discussion of the distinction between the subjective and the objective as found in Bergson's *Time and Free Will*, see Ch. IV, Sect. 3.

subject (limited I) is an absurdity. In quantitative terms, it is simply nothing. Only in relation to each other does Fichte say that the (limited) I and (limited) not-I are now "something". The not-I is a “negative quantity” (*Größe*). Hence Fichte writes in the quote above that a not-I can only be opposed to an I insofar as it is presented, not as it is in itself. A not-I always entails a relation to an I and as a result both not-I and I are limited. We see then how Fichte tries to account for both a qualitative difference of I and not-I, or of subject and object, and for their relational nature qua reciprocal determination. Fichte does not remove all difference between the determinate pole (subject) and the determined pole (object), hence it is not a form of subjective idealism. Because determination is now understood as an activity, and more precisely as an activity that inherently is directional, the difference between that which determines and that which is determined can now be demonstrated. But at the same time this difference remains inherently relational: no determination without something being determined, no subject without an object. Furthermore, because the subject is not defined by or limited to the individual and concrete self, it too can be the passive and determined pole. To the extent that the world determines me, I am a not-I. To the extent that I determine the world, the world is a not-I. We will return to this in the next section when Fichte reformulates this in terms of activity and passivity.

4. Activity and passivity (Part II, §4. A to §4. D of the *Foundations*)

4.1 The "remainder" of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (§4. A and B.)

Part I claims to have laid the ground for the *Wissenschaftslehre*. It consists, as we have seen, of three "logical principles" (Fichte): the principle of self-positing, the principle of opposition, and the principle of divisibility, which he now calls the "grounding principle" (*den des* Grundes) (123 /120).[19] The first principle grounds the other two, and these in turn reciprocally determine each other in it. We may thus, Fichte writes, proceed to "develop" (*entwickeln*) that which belongs to the *Wissenschaftslehre* itself (*ibid.*). Part II and Part III then, in the words of Fichte, are *Wissenschaftslehre* proper, whereas Part I is its foundation. But we have seen in the discussion of the First Principle, all the elements of self-positing, opposition and reciprocal determination are present from the outset.

The *Wissenschaftslehre* (as transcendental philosophy) tries to determine the following synthetic proposition:

> Both I and not-I are posited, in and through the I, as capable of *mutually* limiting *one another*, in such a fashion that the reality of the one negates the reality of the other, and *vice versa* (125 / 122).[20]

The transcendental spontaneity of consciousness posits ("in and through itself") a subject and an object of experience that stand in a relation of reciprocal determination.

19 Why exactly Fichte calls the principles logical I do not claim to know, but that they are not the principles of what we nowadays call logic should be clear from the preceding analysis. As we have seen "A=A" and "I=I" are merely a form of short-hand intended to bring the listener to the proper starting-point of the self-positing I. With the adjective "logical" he probably wanted to indicate that there is an argument that shows why the one principle entails the other.

20 *Das Ich sowohl als das Nicht-Ich sind, beide durch das Ich, und im Ich, als* durcheinander gegenseitig *beschränkbar, d.i. so, daß die Realität des Einen die Realität des Andern aufhebe, und umgekehrt.*

It is this that the remainder of the *Foundations* will try to explicate. But as we are beginning to see, this is not all that different from what Part I tried to explain. The principle contains two others propositions and these form the basis of the practical and theoretical parts of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (Parts III and II respectively).

- The I posits the not-I as limited by the I (*ibid*.).
- The I posits itself as limited by the not-I (126 / 122).

If we keep in mind that this text was written in weekly instalments then it might not come as a surprise that the text at this point does not make abundantly clear what Fichte means by the practical and theoretical. As the comments on pp. 125-7 / 122-3 show, it had not yet become transparent to Fichte himself. Although we will not discuss Part III 'Foundations of Practical Science' the distinction between the practical and the theoretical is important.

4.2 Why Part III of the *Foundations* will not be discussed

The reason why we will not discuss Part III is because all the necessary elements of the argument have already been installed in Part I and II. The problem is already present from the outset, as much in Parts I, II or III. This problem has fundamentally the same structure in each of these parts. How to understand in transcendental fashion (i.e. as relations that are immanent to the experience that we have, [see Fichte at 120 / 117]) a self-active consciousness that is both passively determined from without and actively determining from within and how does this lets us understand an original separation

between I and world. What *does* take place is that the relations between absolute I and limited I / not-I and the various senses of positing are progressively being clarified.[21]

As the problem unfolds we progressively come to see that what is at stake here are two conflicting demands. In light of the "absurd" notion of a real existing thing in itself (see Fichte's discussion of dogmatic realism on 178 / 164) both I and not-I must be shown to be fundamentally and genetically related (i.e., as appearing at the same time). Yet, in order to evade a form of dogmatic idealism that would claim the *reality* of the not-I as resulting from the I (see *loc. cit.*), I and not-I must be seen as fundamentally and qualitatively distinct. The double-sided nature of the problem is less present in Part I where Fichte is mostly concerned with understanding *mere oppositionality* as a condition for the spontaneity of self-positing consciousness. With such oppositionality established the problem of a difference between a *quantitative* relation of I and not-I (e.g. as *degrees of difference*) and a *qualitative* distinction between them becomes more urgent. Although Part II and Part III address this in different ways, the problem itself does not fundamentally change. It therefore is not necessary to discuss Part III.

4.3 The practical and the theoretical perspective

In the *Second Introduction* Fichte distinguishes between the perspective of life and the perspective of philosophy (ZE 483n / 68n). Other related distinctions are those between the relative and the absolute and the transcendental and the empirical. The distinction between the practical and the theoretical as introduced here should be

21 E.g., Fichte first speaks in Part I of self-positing, counterpositing and limitation, then in Part II of activity and passivity and of a difference between quantity and quality, and in Part II of striving and "shock." These conceptual pairs and triads both allow for different expositions of the problem and, in turn, allow Fichte to "deduce" these and other concepts from the initial problem.

understood in light of this. From a practical point of view, the not-I, as that which I find confronting me (*qua* world), is something to be limited or determined by me. We could say that it is both the material for and obstacle to work. This is related to the notion of "striving", a key term in Part III of the *Foundations*. Consciousness for Fichte is an infinite striving to determine the world. The I strives to determine the world, to bring it under knowledge so that, as it were, it becomes part of the I. Already at the end of §1 Fichte had criticised Spinoza for having confused real unity in the system with ideal unity in the system. Unity in the system is a practical, yet never attainable ideal. This striving for unity is the highest unity in the *Wissenschaftslehre* "though not as something that *exists*, but as something we *ought to*, and yet *cannot*, achieve" (101 / 102). The striving of the I is the highest point of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and therefore he now writes that it is ultimately the practical principle that makes possible the theoretical principle (126 / 123). However, this is only a *purely practical* reason; the *thinkability* of this principle depends on that of the theoretical (*ibid*.).

The practical perspective speaks of a not-I that is to be determined by the I. But to even think a mere opposition of I and not-I we must assume an absolute I as grounds for determinability as such. Fichte: "The I is first posited as [an] absolute, and then as a limitable reality, a reality capable of quantity, and indeed as limitable by the not-I (*ibid.*). This is something that becomes clear in reflection, that is, from a theoretical perspective. But *practically speaking* reflection is only possible due to the infinite striving of the I. It is the practical that makes possible the theoretical. As he will later clarify, the practical is a real ground of the theoretical, the theoretical is the ideal ground of the practical (see 153-4 / 145-6). Hence, as Fichte himself readily admits,

the division as such between the practical and the theoretical is a “purely problematic one” (127 /123).

4.4 Passivity is positive, not negative (§4. C)

The question above, about how the I posits itself as a limited I and limited not-I is reformulated in Part II as one of opposing activities, or rather, as activity and passivity. Fichte writes, "all reality is *active*, and everything *active* is reality. Activity is *positive*, absolute (as opposed to merely *relative*) reality" (134 / 129). The opposite of activity is passivity: “Passivity is *positive*, absolute negation, and to that extent is contrasted to merely *relative* negation” (*ibid.*).

Both activity and passivity are positive and absolute reality (see also Sect 3.2 above). Yet, as Fichte will clarify in §4. D. passivity is a lower degree of activity (144-5 / 137-8). *As activity* passivity is positive and absolute. As *determined* activity it is a lower degree of activity, hence not absolute but relative. Here, in §4 C., Fichte already remarks that passivity and activity are *quantitative* in nature (see 133 / 128). This only makes sense if we see *this* passivity and *this* activity (i.e., in relation to each other and not as such) as already derived from absolute activity, i.e., as a *limited* activity and passivity. It is in this way that we may understand the following:

> *Passivity* is the mere negation of the pure concept of activity just established; and more so a *quantitative* one, since it [the pure concept of activity] is itself quantitative; for mere negation of activity, without regard to its quantity = 0, would be *rest* (135 / 130).[22]

22 “Leiden *ist bloße Negation des soeben aufgestellten reinen Begriffs der Tätigkeit; und zwar die* quantitative*, da er selbst quantitativ ist; denn die bloße Negation der Tätigkeit, von der Quantität derselben abstrahieren = 0 wäre* Ruhe.”

Here Fichte distinguishes between a quantitative passivity and a quantitative activity, where (as Fichte points out in §4. D, see esp. 145-6 / 138) quantitative passivity is a *lower degree* (i.e. quantitatively different from) of quantitative activity. This quantitative distinction is then contrasted with another distinction which would be the one between a *qualitative* passivity and a *qualitative* activity, where qualitative passivity would "equal zero, would be *rest"*. This second distinction, however, must be taken in a hypothetical sense only. Passivity *would be* rest, but rest, as a zero degree of activity, cannot be affirmed. Since all reality is activity we only have degrees of activity and never its total absence. Passivity as absence of activity is only ever a relative absence, that is, relative to the presence of activity. The role of this hypothetical qualitative negation is a negative noumenon (a thought entity), in the same sense as the absolute not-I we discussed above (see Sect. 3.4). It helps us understand the argument without actually being affirmed. Hence, from absolute activity, or activity *as such,* to a differentiation of activity in activity and passivity we do not find negation as some external cause (absolute not-I or absolute rest). Absolute activity, as activity, is simple, it is *only* or "*bloße"* activity. This activity, we could say, using a more modern formulation, *differentiates itself;* it is a self-differentiating activity. It differentiates itself because self-positing entails positing and counterpositing; it entails a spectrum ranging from activity to passivity. Negation, counterpositing, or passivity, must thus be understood in a "positive" sense, or as "internal" to the "absolute" nature of activity. This principle of critical idealism is thus that:

> [I]t proceeds neither from an absolute activity of the I, nor of the not-I, but rather from a determinacy which is at the same time a determining, since nothing else either is, or can be, immediately contained in consciousness (178 / 164).[23]

4.5 Passivity is a lower degree of activity (§4. D)

The principle of critical idealism is that, in restraining ourselves to what we find in experience, we discover ourselves both as determined and as determining. To the extent that we are determined, we are passive, to the extent that we are determining we are active. Equally, to the extent that we determine the not-I, this not-I is passive, to the extent that it determines us, it is active. Activity and passivity are thus interrelated.

> The I is to be determined, that is, reality, or (as this concept has just been defined [i.e., as self-positing]) *activity* is to be annulled in it. And thereby we posit in it the opposite of activity. But the opposite of activity is called *passivity* (134 / 130).

When the I (as self-positing or as activity) is to be determined (by the not-I or empirical intuitions) then part of its activity must be annulled (*aufgehoben*). We thus posit the opposite of activity, which is passivity. Under a principle of reciprocal determination this means that the degree of the one is the inverse degree of the other, hence passivity is a measure of activity (139 / 134). The two, Fichte writes, can be compared to that of light and darkness. If at M there is light, and at N there is darkness, then there must be a point O that is both light and dark, which would be a contradiction. Not however, if this point O of twilight is taken as a mixture of light and darkness: “light and darkness

23 *Er geht in seiner Erklärung der Vorstellung weder von einer absoluten Tätigkeit des Ich, noch des Nicht-Ich, sondern von einem Bestimmtsein aus, das zugleich ein Bestimmen ist, weil im Bewußtsein unmittelbar nichts anderes enthalten ist, noch enthalten sein kann.*

are not opposed in principle, but differ only in degree [*den Graden nach unterschieden*]. Darkness is simply a very minute amount of light. – That is precisely how things stand between the I and the not-I" (145 / 138).

How, now, can the I be seen as both active and passive at the same time? Fichte explains:

> [The I] is *determinant* (bestimmend), insofar as it posits itself, through absolute spontaneity, in a determinate sphere (...); and insofar as we think merely of this absolute positing without regard for the limits of the sphere. It is *determinate* (bestimmt), insofar as it is regarded as posited in this particular sphere, without regard for the spontaneity of positing as such (141 / 135).

Again then, considered as "absolute spontaneity" the I is pure activity. But this sponteneity is to posit or determine a particular sphere. From this point of view it must be seen as determined.

5. "Independent activity", a return to qualitative difference (§4. E)

At the start of §4.E, the last subsection prior to the Practical Part and one that exceeds in length all preceding parts of the *Foundations* together, Fichte reviews the development of the Theoretical Part up to this point. *The I posits itself as determined by the not-I*. This was the principle of reflection of theoretical philosophy. I am determined by the not-I, i.e., my experiences have a ground in something outside of me. But this is a ground that *I* posit, and thus I equally determine *myself* as being determined from the outside. How then to understand the I as both determining and as being determined?

This was resolved in §4.D: determination and determinacy are the same, to the extent that I posit passivity in the I, or a being determined of the I itself, I posit activity in the not-I and *vice versa*. They are inverse degrees of each other.

"But, Fichte writes, these answers have taken us winging in a circle" (146 / 139). In the subsequent passage Fichte will hit on a contradiction that will finally lead him to the Practical Part of the *Foundations*. This contradiction, I claim, has in fact been present from the outset. Although the Practical Part will shed a new light on it, it will not fundamentally alter the argument. It is worthwhile quoting this passage in full because it is a crucial turning point in the argument. The passage is all the more important because, albeit in more abstract form, it will be precisely this problem that Bergson too will encounter in *Creative Evolution*, as we shall see later on in the thesis.

> If the I posits a lesser degree of activity in itself, then it admittedly posits thereby a passivity in itself and an activity in the not-I. But the I can have no power to posit absolutely a lower degree of activity in itself, for in virtue of the concept of substantiality, it posits all activity, and nothing but activity, in itself. Hence the positing of this lower degree of activity in the I would have to be preceded by an activity of the not-I; the latter, indeed, would first have to have abolished some parts of the I's activity, before the I could assert some lesser part thereof. But this is impossible, in that, owing to the concept of efficacy, the not-I can be credited with an activity only to the extent that a passivity is asserted in the I (*ibid*.).

If the absolute I could posit a lower degree of activity, then it could posit activity in the not-I. But how could the I posit itself as a lower degree of activity? The I as such (as spontaneity) is only active. It is only from a perspective transcendent to, or outside of, the I that it would be possible to posit the I as passive, as a lower degree of activity. It is the principle of transcendent idealism that the I itself is able to posit its own passivity (147 / 140). For such an idealism the I alone would suffice. But this idealism would not

be able to account for the relation to a not-I, something which for Fichte is a fact (*ibid*.). Since it cannot account for the fact of this relation this philosophy is deemed "incomplete".

The positing of the passivity (or the determinateness) of the I would thus have be preceded by an activity of the not-I, Fichte writes in the quoted passage. But such a principle would equally be transcendent. It is transcendent realism that accredits activity to the not-I, outside of any relation to the I. Yet how could such activity be posited by the I as something that concerns the I? Again, it is only "for some intelligent being external to the I, which observes the I and not-I engaged in this transaction (...) but not for the I itself" (146 / 139).

Both propositions, employed, as Fichte writes, "in isolation", cannot explain in *transcendental* fashion how the I posits itself as determined by a not-I. It is at this point that Fichte appeals to a notion that will be very important in the Practical Part of the Foundations. He writes, we will have to posit an activity in the I that is not opposed by a passivity in the not-I and an activity in the not-I that is not opposed by a passivity in the I. That is, we must posit two forms of "independent activity", one by the I and one by the not-I (149 / 141).

The problem of the account given in the preceding parts about the interdependent nature of activity and passivity is that the very distinction of I and not-I is in danger of collapse. If both are merely inverted degrees of each other, how then to claim that the I is I and the not-I not-I? Is it not the case that the I is always and only active and that the not-I is that which is wholly different from the I? If I and not-I are merely degrees of activity, then we will have fallen into either transcendent idealism,

where the objectivity of the world is lost. We lapse into a transcendent realism where the I becomes a mere epiphenomenon of the material world. The quantitative relation or measure (*Verhältnis*) of I and not-I will need to be supplemented and reconciled with a qualitative difference of I and not-I.

As we will show in the chapters on Bergson, he too encounters this problem. In *Matter and Memory* Bergson demonstrated that continuity of duration and space and of mind and matter. But then the question poses itself how we are to account for the real difference between the "organised" and the "unorganised", between the living and the dead. Hence he must demonstrate a real discontinuity, *within* the already established continuity.

The need for Fichte to distinguish between a "real" and an "ideal" ground can be understood in light of this. He writes: "The real ground of the passivity [of the I] is an activity of the not-I, independent of reciprocity" (154 / 146). My experience is caused by something outside of me. As Fichte is well aware this lend itself to dogmatic realism. However, we must posit independent activity in the not-I because "the fact [is] that the passivity in the I is a qualitative affair" (*ibid*.). If it was not, then, we could ask, how would we be able to distinguish between fiction and reality. But the truth is that I cannot at will bend reality to my desires, the world is there and it resists my determinations. Yet in reflection on this, i.e., when we ask after the conditions for the possibility of experience as such, this qualitative affair can only be thought as a quantitative affair "and the not-I again becomes a merely ideal ground" (155 / 146). To understand the possibility of experience we assume that I and not-I appear in reciprocal determination.

The remainder of §4.E will consist of an attempt to reconcile such independent activity with the interdependent nature of activity-passivity. Although the problem seems to increase in complexity in terms of the number of oppositions to be reconciled, fundamentally it remains the same. Hence when Fichte asks, how now to understand the difference between the independent activity of the I and that of the not-I he writes:

> Simply insofar as it [i.e., an action of the I] is an action at all, and nothing more, there must be no ground or condition to restrict it; it may or it may not take place; action as such occurs with absolute spontaneity. But insofar as it requires to be directed to an object, it is restricted; there might be no action (…); but once an action takes place, it must be directed to this very object and can be related to no other (159 / 150).

Activity *as such* is unconditioned or absolute, but *as (actual) activity* it must be directed to an object. This is an internal necessity, for otherwise it would not consist of what it is, namely a determination of an object. Hence, *once* it takes place, it *must* be directed. It is the effect of philosophical abstraction that we speak of activity outside of its relation to an object. Yet practically speaking, i.e, in its actual performance, it always entails an object. Part III of the *Foundations* will rephrase this in terms of "striving" and "shock" (*Anstoß*). The I as such is an infinite striving, but it is called forth by a shock. As infinite striving it is not conditioned by the choc, but it cannot be conceived without the shock either. Transcendent idealism and transcendent realism are contained within transcendental idealism, but we must always carefully separate the two perspectives. Hence to the re-issue of 1802 (which only varies marginally from the first edition) Fichte adds a sentence just after the passage quoted above. He writes: "It is looked at from two points of view" (160 / 150).

As we have already noted, critical or transcendental idealism proceeds from a *Bestimmtsein,* which at the same time is a *Bestimmen.* But transcendental idealism, under its theoretical aspect alone, takes us winging in a circle. We need to posit interdependent activity and passivity and reciprocally determining I and not-I. Yet this in itself entails the assumption of independent activity by the I (its absolute spontaneity) and independent activity by the not-I (its "shock"). These two sides are in conflict. As Fichte himself admits,

> As to what this determination may again determine, the theory offers no decision at all; and in virtue of this incompleteness, we are thus driven on beyond theory into a practical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (178 / 164).

From a theorectical perspective the question as to the *ground* of the spontaneity of consciousness *itself* must be posited but can never be answered "completely". It can never be completely answered because the two demands that are made are ultimately irreconcilable. Critical philosophy restricted to its theoretical sense is thus incomplete and critical philosophy restricted to the pratical is incomplete. But the sense in which it is incomplete is not the same in which dogmatic idealism and dogmatic realism are incomplete. For one, these positions are unaware of the limitations of their points of view, whereas critical philosophy is not only aware of these limitations, but in fact is able to make it explicit. Hence the fact that a complete system is an impossibility does not make the attempt a failure; rather, it makes it both a modest and a properly self-critical one.

III. AN EXERCISE IN AMBIGUITY

1. A programme for (transcendental) philosophy

Fichte's project responded to a number of challenges raised against transcendental philosophy. These concerned both the proper understanding of transcendental philosophy itself and a demand for a demonstration of transcendental philosophy as a true philosophy of freedom. These challenges I have attempted to reconstruct in the form of a programme (see Ch I., Sect. 4). It asks: what are the conditions under which a philosophy of freedom could be demonstrated as a superior philosophy? In calling itself a programme and not (yet) a full-fledged philosophy of freedom it not only reserves the right to elaborate a future, more positive, account of the nature of freedom, but it even reserves for itself the question whether such a philosophy could be possible at all.

The question about the limitations of the project of a philosophy of freedom became unavoidable with Kant's Copernican revolution. Kant rigorously restricted philosophical investigation to what is found in experience. He effectively separated knowledge *sensu stricto* from what from then on becomes a reflection on the conditions

of knowledge. If knowledge always contains an empirical element, and philosophy becomes a reflection on knowledge, then the question as to the status of philosophical knowledge itself must be asked. Can philosophy still claim to *know* metaphysical *truths*? Is the reflection on the conditions of knowledge itself a form of knowledge, or is it something else? How can we claim to *know* transcendental conditions? If knowledge of metaphysical truths now becomes much more problematic, how are we to demonstrate its validity? As Fichte will come to say in the later *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo,* philosophy proceeds from a "fact" (i.e., experience) to its foundation. But how is this possible, he asks? He writes

> [We will have to] philosophize about philosophy. The question concerning the possibility of philosophy is thus itself a philosophical question. Philosophy provides an answer to the question concerning its own possibility. Accordingly, one can demonstrate the possibility of philosophy only by arguing in a circular fashion, or *philosophy requires no proof and is simply and absolutely possible* (WLnm 12-3 / 89, emp. added).[1]

The possibility of, and the possible limitations for, philosophy becomes itself a philosophical concern.

Fichte wanted to demonstrate the validity of transcendental idealism but in a strictly transcendental fashion. It is might seem easy to shrug off these concerns but we should remember that, in its day, Kant's transcendentalism was more likely to be misunderstood than understood. A common misunderstanding was to take Kant's

1 Breazeale's translation actually reads: "...in a circular fashion, or, philosophy requires no proof ..." This second comma could be read to imply that Fichte affirms that philosophy requires no proof, whereas I propose to read this rhetorically: the only proof must be circular, or else philosophy remains unfounded. This is affirmed by the passage immediately following this where Fichte discusses the foundation of philosophy. This foundation is said to be self-grounding and not ungrounded, see WLnm 14 / 91. To be clear, this in no way imputes the opinion to Breazeale of considering Fichte's project as non-foundationalist, rather to the contrary. It merely concerns the reading of this passage.

reference to a "thing in itself" to consist of a (knowledge or reality) claim of some object existing outside of the representing consciousness. It was thought that when one speaks of a thing, one also claims the existence of this thing. But for Kant and Fichte the thing in itself was not an object in the world, let alone an object of possible experience (human or otherwise), but a presupposition necessary to account for experience as such. The distinction between epistemological and ontological claims might be apparent to us now, but this was not always the case. We should not forget that we benefit from over two centuries of philosophical engagement with these issues. Likewise, we should also be attentive to the fact that philosophers working in the 1790's were participating in one of the most intense periods of philosophical debate the world has ever witnessed. They had neither the leisure nor the means (in terms of access to literature) that we enjoy today to deal with these matters. This makes Fichte's achievement all the more remarkable.

1.1 Idealism and objectivity

What again was Fichte's programme for a philosophy of freedom? As we know, it tried to respond to a number of concerns raised in the immediate reception of Kant. What is the status of the thing in itself? How do we demonstrate that the conditions for experience are really *the* conditions for experience and not some merely posited set of conditions? How do we show that our limited human form of knowledge is adequate to the world? What unites practical and theoretical philosophy, freedom and necessity? What is the ground for transcendental philosophy? These, as it were, internal and systematic concerns we have tried to link to the more external concerns (*vis à vis*

determinism) of demonstrating transcendental idealism as the true philosophy of freedom. Kant's positing of a spontaneous act of synthesis as the highest condition for the possibility of experience I have situated in an implicit debate with a radical empiricist project that aimed to demonstrate experience as a purely determined and mechanical affair. I will have more to say on this when we turn to the chapters on Bergson, and especially on what to make of what I have been calling real and productive freedom. But as we saw towards the end of Chapter I, the argument that attempts to demonstrate the superiority of this assumption may be formulated in relative independence from a critique of determinism. At the end of that chapter the stakes for a philosophy of freedom were formulated as follows:

> *If the absolute I, as transcendental spontaneity, is a necessary condition for the empirical relations between a subject and an object of experience (limited I and limited not-I), can we now show how such a subject and such an object, standing in relations of reciprocal determination, are themselves necessary conditions for real and productive freedom?*

Starting with transcendental spontaneity as first principle we needed to show how material relations can be explained as a necessary condition for such spontaneity. Only if we were able to show this could we claim superiority over determinism because only in this way would we be able to account for more than determinism. We needed to show that the objectivity of the world was not the effect of “transcendental” illusion but is what is really the case in the world.

Contrary to what is sometimes thought, neither Fichte nor Kant were idealists in the strict sense of the word. They did not doubt that there was really a world of objects "out there", nor did they doubt that our experience portrays the world as it really is; indeed, I would go so far as to say that for both thinkers the *only* experience that we *can* have is *this* experience and that the world really is the way we think it is.[2] Their idealism rather lies elsewhere. They were concerned with an explanation of the possibility of the only experience that we have (i.e., *this one*). What do we need to assume in order to understand the possibility of experience? Philosophy is a reflection on and an attempt to explain how our experience of the world is possible. The conditions for the possibility of experience were not so much material or causal conditions, but first and foremost the conditions of thinkability (although perhaps this distinction is not always radically maintained). In order to explain experience they came to the conclusion that a purely realistic, i.e., materialistic or mechanistic theory of knowledge is untenable. The mere aggregation of sense impressions never results in the *qualitative* phenomenon of experience. As Ralph Walker for example writes: "[Kant] argues ... that even where judgment is not involved, in the most elementary kind of concept-application and in pre-conceptual awareness, synthesis is still required and must be category-governed. [This rendered] permanently untenable the British empiricists' quasi-pictorial account of ideas as copies of sense-impressions."[3] Experience already at its most basic level requires synthesis. Synthesis involves discernment,

2 See Kant KrV A 110: "There is only one experience ... If one speaks of different experiences they are only so many perceptions insofar as they belong to one and the same universal experience." See also the quote from Fichte we have already discussed: [T]he assumption that objects exist outside of and quite independent of us [i.e., realism], is contained within idealism itself (...) Indeed, it is the sole aim of all philosophy to provide a derivation of objective truth (ZE 455n / 38n).

3 Ralph C.S. Walker 2008, 244. See also KrV A79 / B104-5, where Kant claims the same function for both the synthesis found in (propositional) judgment and for the synthesis found in uniting the manifold of intuitions.

evaluation, comparison, etcetera. It requires the active involvement of consciousness. Only an transcendental-idealistic theory of experience can account for this.

Fichte understood that to demonstrate the necessity of objectivity in its most rudimentary form we would need to show the opposition of I and not-I as arising out of self-positing. This I and not-I are not, or not yet, a self and a not-self, nor are they a subject and an object. The I is not a self because we do not yet speak of a sense of self at this point. It is not an object because objects are already part of a world and the distinction between I and world assumes a prior distinction between determinability and determinacy. We first need to understand how I and not-I arise out of synthesis or self-positing. Only then do we proceed to determine the various relations between such an I and not-I.

We have seen how in the *Foundations* Fichte tried to unpack the initial proposition stated above. On the one hand there is the "absolute" and "unconditioned" principle of self-positing. Considered "as such" it is unconditioned because it precedes and first makes possible any such conditioning. But this self-positing entails a duality of positing and counterpositing. Positing and counterpositing stand in a relation of reciprocal determination. And these two related forms of positing are themselves the only way under which positing *schlechthin* may be thought. To repeat again a key passage from §1 that we discussed in Ch. II, Sect. 2.5:

> The I presents itself to itself, to that extent it imposes on itself the form of a presentation, and is now for the first time a something, namely an object; in this form consciousness acquires a substrate, which exists (GWL 97 / 98).

The absolute I, or self-caused and productive transcendental activity, posits itself and this positing results in a *Vorstellung*. But a *Vor-stellung* immediately entails a fundamental duality of something, erected in opposition to something else. The absolute I "imposes" a presentation on itself *and* it becomes a "something", *ein Etwas.* It becomes something *determinate.* This, in a nutshell is what the *Foundations* attempted to clarify.

1.2 Two problems: circularity and the difference and continuity of I and not-I

Crucial to the success of a philosophy of freedom is to demonstrate the necessity of material individuation, understood to consist first and foremost in an opposition of I and not-I. This is achieved when oppositionality (further qualified as entailing reciprocal determination) is demonstrated as itself a condition for self-positing. Fichte want to provide the groundworks for philosophy but this is not an Archimedean foundation. As we saw above, the question of the ground for philosophy is itself a philosophical issue. Hence Fichte claims that philosophy must be self-grounding (WLnm 14 / 91). This entails a circular argument and one thing we will need to clarify is the *sense* of this circular argument. If A entails B, and B entails A, can we nonetheless speak of a starting point; is there a *direction* to this circular argument? How do we start and where do we start?

A second question is how to understand both a quantitative difference of I and not-I, i.e., as activity and passivity, and their *qualitative* difference, one conceived in terms of "independent action", or, as it is formulated in the Practical Part of the

Foundations, as activity and resistance. Towards the end of Chapter II we saw that Fichte was forced to reintroduce this qualitative difference to prevent a lapse into dogmatic idealism. This we will need to further clarify. How are we to think I and not-I as both quantitatively related and qualitatively distinct? This is very important in light of our juxtaposition with Bergson. In *Creative Evolution* Bergson will speak of "spirituality" and "materiality" as two tendencies that "invert" each other and hence are lower degrees of each other, but also of two forces that "interrupt" and "undo" each other. They form a continuum (inversion / quantitative relation) *and* they strive to undo each other (interruption / qualitative difference). This clearly parallels Fichte's problem. As we are beginning to see the distinction between two perspectives or attitudes ("theoretical" and "practical") will be crucial in any reconciliation of the two conflicting demands. It is in a meditation on the differences between the two perspectives that Fichte, and as we shall see when we turn to Bergson, for him aswell, that any solution must be located.

2. Circular foundationalism

2.1 A first and a second principle

If A entails B, and B entails A we could start with A or B at will. Indeed there is a real danger of collapsing the very distinction of A and B. Now, to an extent this must simply be admitted. In the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, first presented in the year after the lectures on the *Foundations,* Fichte will abandon the tri-partite presentation of a laying of the ground (*Grundlage* / fundamental principles), a theoretical part and a

practical part. Rather, the *nova methodo* will start with "one single, undivided act" and "[w]hen this first act occurs, all the others occur simultaneously". However, as we can only become acquainted with anything when we "disassemble and dissect it", we obtain "a series of interconnected actions of the I" (WLnm 9 / 84). Although one can start from a practical perspective of the infinite striving of the I and world that "checks" this striving, or alternatively start with "pure self-positing" and then derive counterpositing, there is still a difference between the two accounts. From a purely argumentative or heuristic point of view one might prefer one kind of exposition over the other (e.g., *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* over *Foundations*). However, from the point of view of fundamental principles a certain distinction must be maintained.

When I first spoke of Fichte's programme (Ch. I, Sect. 4) it seemed as though what he called "dogmatism" and "idealism" had equivalent principles. The principles seem to have the same value because neither side could convince the other. When the idealist spoke of consciousness, the dogmatist thought of an epiphenomenon, and when the dogmatist spoke of the independence of the thing, the idealist would claim that this by itself entailed consciousness. But this was only true at its surface. *Transcendental* idealism, starting with what is given in experience claims to be able to account for both its *determined* and its *determining* aspects. It does not merely assume a dual series of consciousness and object but is also able to explain the genetic interconnectedness of the two. Hence idealism claims superiority over dogmatism. It is for this reason that self-positing is the *first* unconditioned principle, whereas counterpositing and reciprocal determination (what we have also called the material principle) come second.

When self-positing, or also “original synthesis”, or again “spontaneous act of synthesis” is taken as “absolute”, or “*schlechthin”*, as a *first principle* that is, this then must be understood as a principled choice against a reductive, deterministic principle that assumes we only need causally determined relations between objects to account for reality and our experience of it. It is in this sense that “original synthesis” is original or “first”. From this perspective opposition and reciprocal determination are second and third principles. Together they are *material* principles that may be seen to represent determinism. But this distinction (between the first and the second and third principle) is external to how the argument itself functions and thus should not be confused with the *internal* structure of the argument. The external argument is against determinism. But the *internal* argument is concerned with a demonstration of the *simultaneity* of the three principles. As we have repeatedly stressed, only if we are able to demonstrate that a synthetic or spontaneous principle can only ever be properly understood when seen as taking the form of an opposition of a determining pole and a determined pole, of a subject and a object, and thus only when the empirical relations between subject and object are as much the condition for the act of synthesis as the act of synthesis is the condition for these empirical relations (“A entails B and B entails A”), will our argument be able to advance the stalemate of determinism and freedom. Internal to the argument synthesis is not original, because it does not precede I and not-I; internal to the argument the three principles are simultaneous.

On the level of principles idealism and realism/dogmatism have distinct principles. The transcendental-idealist principle claims superiority because it is able to *includes* realism. This it is able to do because the simultaneity of the principles of

transcendental idealism (self-positing, opposition and reciprocal determination) *include* the realist principle. In transcendental idealism we are concerned with something that is *both* "*das Tätige, und das, was durch die Tätigkeit hervorgebracht wird*", with something that is both agent and activity, *and* with something that is said to be neither thesis nor antithesis. In short, a *Tathandlung*.

2.2 Self-positing and the self-grounding of philosophy

Fichte wanted to provide a ground for transcendental philosophy and this ground lay in the *Tathandlung*. *Tathandlung* should not first and foremost be understood as the performative activity of someone, but rather as an attempt to formulate in a more activising, processual manner the transcendental assumption of synthetic unity that underlies all empirical experience. The self-positing I for all attempts and purposes may be seen as synonymous with the *Tathandlung*. In positing itself it erects itself. It is both the representing and what this brings about. The simultaneity of the three principles is thus contained within the *Tathandlung* or the self-positing I. To explain how this must be understood and to dispel the many misunderstandings that easily arise Fichte then proceeds to unpack the *Tathandlung*.

It is not the case that there is 1.) a principle of self-positing, 2.) one of opposition and 3.) of reciprocal determination, as though these were all separate moments within the argument. Rather, self-positing already assumes opposition and opposition already assumes the reciprocal determination of opposites. This Fichte clarifies through the distinction between an absolute I, a limited I and a limited not-I. An absolute not-I, as we have seen, plays a mere hypothetical or noumenal role and is in no sense affirmed

by Fichte. The absolute I is absolute in the sense of a consideration of self-positing as "pure" spontaneity or as positing *schlechthin*. As *bloßes Handlung* the absolute I refers to the spontaneous nature of judgment or consciousness. This, as we have shown, should be understood in light of the implicit discussion with a first principle of material determinism. Yet such a "pure" activity only exists *in abstracto* and hence should always be reintegrated in concrete or "completed consciousness". Hence the absolute I necessitates the discussion of I and not-I, that is, of limited I and limited not-I.

If consciousness is self-grounding in the manner elaborated above, may we perhaps assume that philosophy, as a reflection *immanent* to (empirical) knowledge, is equally self-grounding?[4] I only want to make a number of suggestions here as really these are very difficult issues and a thorough discussion of them would lead us beyond what is required. If we are all realists in our everyday life in that we all assume that reality is more or less the way it strikes us and if, therefore, we assume that our knowledge of the world is more or less correct (though of course always open to improvement), philosophy becomes not so much a separate form of knowledge or something that is either above knowledge (meta-physics) or below it (grounds of knowledge) but rather is now *internal* to knowledge. Philosophy is often understood as reflection but the object that it supposedly reflects does not stand to philosophy in the same way that (empirical) knowledge is said to stand to its object.[5] If this were the case then philosophy would indeed be some higher or lower level form of knowledge, with its own proper object, its own methodology and hence the need for a foundation of the

4 Fichte: "Critical philosophy is ... *immanent,* since it posits everything in the I; dogmatic philosophy is *transcendent,* since is goes beyond the I", GWL 120 / 117.

5 We leave aside here the question of the purported representational nature of all knowledge. If with Fichte knowledge becomes thinkable as a forms of conscious activity, then with Bergson the whole notion of representational knowledge will be fully rooted out and an alternative account given.

possibility of philosophy in yet another level of knowledge, i.e., meta-philosophy. This would lead to an infinite regress comparable to the one that would ensue when self-consciousness is taken as consciousness of some object called "self".

When we reflect on knowledge we are said to take a step back from things. But we could also try to formulate it in a less spatial language, one less inclined to reintroduce a subject-object distinction. We could perhaps compare reflection to something like the idea of active adaptation. When we perform a certain task we do not perform it in always the exact same manner. Bergson, in his wonderful essay on laughter, denotes the comical as the *unadaptive*. It is when someone continues as though everything were exactly the same as before, i.e., in a rigid, *unreflecting* kind of way, that we feel inclined to laugh at such a person.[6] But generally (dinosaurs and comedians aside) we do adjust and such adjustments at least in part must be understood as entailing the judgment that the same thing has changed and that a better way of *doing the same* is possible. This, to me, must be understood as proto-reflective at least.

2.3 Practical and theoretical subjectivity

Philosophy as self-grounding seems to exclude all extra-philosophical grounds for philosophy. To the extent that such a ground is seen as meta-philosophical (another, higher, form of philosophy) this is correct. However, as Fichte notes at the very start of the *Foundations* and stresses yet again in the 1802 edition with a footnote, *Tathandlung* does not and cannot appear in the empirical determinations of consciousness (GWL 91,

6 See *Le rire* in *Œuvres*, translation: *Laughter, An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2005) translated by Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell.

91n / 93, 93n). To the extent that *Tathandlung* concerns the transcendental condition, such a statement is unproblematic. But there is an ambiguity here that goes to the very heart of the problem, one we would be well-advised to make explicit. This ambiguity will become all the more apparent when we turn to our discussion of Bergson, standing as he did at the very end of 19th Century philosophy.[7] We will, however, only be able discuss this briefly.

Looking back at Fichte from the start of the 21st Century, we may start to see two quite different strands developing out of Fichte (and indeed perhaps this is already the case with Kant).[8] On the one hand Fichte remains very close to the transcendental concerns about the possibility of knowledge that interested Kant and indeed I have tried to stress these links. Here self-positing is another word for transcendental synthesis and intellectual intuition denotes the philosophical nature of such a presupposition, or alternatively the immediate consciousness that must be presupposed for experience to be possible. However, as we have already noted in Ch. I, Sect. 3.4, the use Fichte makes of intellectual intuition is ambiguous.

The immediate awareness of myself as being a free agent is, as Frederick Neuhouser argues, not to be directly equated with transcendental apperception. Neuhouser distinguishes between practical and theoretical subjectivity. Practical subjectivity, i.e., self-determination, a consideration of myself as a free acting agent, and theoretical subjectivity (transcendental synthesis) differ for Neuhouser because where the existence of a subject in some sense results from, or is constituted by, its own

7 Here understood in the wide sense of having run from the French Revolution (1789) to the First World War (1914).

8 Henrich considers the so-called Anglo-Saxon - Continental split to have originated with Fichte, although I am not sure whether the two sides as I see them would correspond to this geographical divide. See Henrich 2003, 4. See also the 'Intermezzo' in this thesis.

activity, practical subjectivity refers to what he calls a "qualitative constitution": "Here it is not *that* I exist that is up to me, but *how* I exist."[9] But, as Neuhouser also notes, Fichte *did* think that these two questions were conjoined in what Neuhouser calls "reflexive consciousness."[10] *That* I exist, we could say concerns my free nature in the sense of the spontaneity of experience, and, we may add, ultimately the spontaneity of life. Although at first this is a purely philosophical assumption, Fichte quite clearly links this to what we might call the more ethical question of self-determination. Here the question is: *how* do I determine my life?

When Fichte reformulates Kant in an active voice and thus speaks of infinite striving and counterstriving, of will, force, and activity, and of the possibility of becoming aware of such activity, we seem to be moving away from a purely transcendental investigation of the conditions of knowledge towards something we could very inadequately call a proto-existentialist, metaphysical-psychological philosophy that aims to understand *reality*, rather than experience, in terms of will. We might want to clearly separate the two, or choose one over the other, but for Fichte the two were not clearly distinct.

This second Fichtean philosophy has historically been rather prominent. An early philosopher we might want to place in this lineage is Schopenhauer, who, as we know, was one of Fichte's students in Berlin. From the world as will we may go to Stirner, then on to Nietzsche, and when we come to Bergson duration is no longer a philosophical presupposition but has become something he clearly felt we can actually experience.

9 Frederick Neuhouser, *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 170.
10 *Op. cit.,* 168.

Many of the concerns of the 19th Century find their origin in Fichte's "activising" reformulation of Kant's philosophy.[11]

This is reflected in the history of Fichte-literature. On several occasions I have insisted on retaining the term "I" and not to yield to a translation as "self" or "subject". But it is not hard to see that one would come to equate these terms. Much of the Fichte-literature, at least until very recently, has tried to read him in this way.[12] And indeed, privileging Fichte's practical philosophy over the theoretical most certainly allows for such a reading. But at least insofar as it concerns the *Foundations* such a reading must not be unequivocally assumed. In the *Foundations* Fichte does not strip experience down to the self-evidence of my existence to then elaborate a theory of subjectivity.[13] To the extent that in the Jena period he is concerned with subjectivity this is always linked expressly to the problem of objectivity.

2.4 The intuition and the concept of the I

We should be careful not to want to overly separate the two sides to Fichte's thought. Furthermore, I do not think that this ambiguity makes of Fichte a confused thinker. If anything, and quite in contrast to how Fichte has often been seen, it points to an essential modesty that philosophy must assume. This becomes more clear when we take

11 See e.g... Franck Fischbach, *L'être et l'acte. Enquête sur les fondements de l'ontologie moderne de l'agir* (Paris: Vrin, 2002) for a novel reading of the philosophy of activity, or more precisely *le passage de l'acte à l'être* in Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and Marx.

12 One of the more recent attempts in this, though still very interesting and illuminating in its own right, is Alexis Philonenko's reading of Fichte, one that relies heavily on the notion of intersubjectivity. See Alexis Philonenko *La Liberté humaine dans la philosophie de Fichte* (Paris: Vrin, 1980).

13 See Alexis Philonenko, “Une lecture fichtéenne du cartésianisme n'est-elle pas nécessaire?,” in *Le transcendantal et la pensée moderne* (Paris: P.U.F, 1990), 40 and 38 resp. Let me stress that Philonenko's work does contain many important insights.

serious the distinction that Fichte draws between the intuition of the I and the concept of the I.

We first mentioned the distinction between the intuition of the I and the concept of the I towards the end of Ch. I, Sect. 3.2. In "Chapter One" of *An Attempt* Fichte makes this distinction. The I, grasped in intuition, is agility, *Schweben*, a constant weaving or wavering motion between determining and being determined. If the I is the activity of determining something and if such determination "results" in a concept of something then this concept of the I cannot claim *de jure* to be the same as that what it is about (intuition of the I).[14] Indeed, as Thomas-Fogiel stresses, the distinction is radical because the adequacy of concept to intuition is no longer guaranteed.[15] For Thomas-Fogiel, placing herself in the Henrich-school, this distinction follows from Fichte's assumption of the immediacy of consciousness. Through the distinction between the intuition of the I and the concept of the I Fichte effectively breaks with the tradition of subjectivity.[16]

As we have seen (see Ch.I, Sect. 2.2), this tradition views self-consciousness as based on a subject-object model, or a representationalist model. On this model all awareness is awareness of something, where the object is necessarily external to the awareness of the object. Awareness of self thus becomes awareness of some thing-like entity called self. We may then ask: is it round, is it square? The first step away from this model is to stop conceiving consciousness as some object-like self that is conscious of itself as object. Consciousness is activity, it is the activity of *Bestimmung*, of

14 As I have pointed out, Fichte's intuition-concept distinction should not be confused with Kant's. See my footnote to Ch. I, Sect. 3.3

15 Thomas-Fogiel 2000, 75. See also the opening remarks to the *Foundations* that the First Principle "can neither be *proved*, nor *defined*" (GWL 91 / 93)

16 *Op. cit.*, 74.

determination, and this, as we have seen in the *Foundations*, entails two poles of determinate being and of determining. When Fichte in "Chapter One" invites us to "think the I", he wants to draw our attention to the activity that is thought. Even if only on philosophical grounds we will have to consider such activity as spontaneous in nature. This effectively means that consciousness is *what it is* (i.e., the activity of determination) in its *performance* or actuality. It is "in and through itself" because as spontaneous activity it is not determined by anything and in being active it is *what* it is. Consciousness is therefore immediate. When Kant writes that such consciousness must always, at least potentially, be conjoined with the *representation* "I think", this representation, at least for Fichte, is not what first makes consciousness possible. But how then, *is* such a representation possible? One of the things that Fichte thinks makes this representation possible is that attention may be directed to the activity of thought itself. But to pay attention to thought, or, as he writes also, to reflect on conscious activity, isn't this precisely to make of consciousness an object of thought? Again, Fichte denies this claim. He denies that awareness of thought must somehow be external to thought. As Thomas-Fogiel writes: "Fichte's discovery is the discovery of auto-referentiality as a model of truth that is radical in way never thematised before."[17] It is radical because Fichte claims 1.) that there is no alternative to it (except determinism / "the thing" but this has already been discredited); 2.) it is not a representationalist model; it does not refer to anything external; and 3.) self-consciousness is neither a logical identity of I and I, nor a real identity (ascribing I to itself).[18]

Although I agree with much that Thomas-Fogiel writes, my concern here is that she, together with Henrich and Frank place too much emphasis on subjectivity, whereas

17 *Op. cit.,* 81.
18 *Ibid*.

what is so intesting about Fichte is his account of how subjectivity is always conjoined with objectivity.

Consciousness is immediate. It is a spontaneous act of synthesis and our own (empirical) consciousness of ourselves only first becomes possible on the basis of it. We could see this as just some necessary transcendental condition. We could furthermore attempt to demonstrate its validity by deriving empirical experience from it, as we have seen Fichte attempting to do in the *Foundations.* But we may still want to ask: how do I know of immediate consciousness? How can I become aware of this act of synthesis? Thomas-Fogiel claims that ultimately such awareness can only be given in an intuition. But this intuition in itself does not give us any knowledge. Rather, it will need to be expressed through concepts. But because the thing we are trying to express is the ground of all determination, and of conceptual thought as such, it can never be adequately expressed in concepts. The I is a "first truth", or as we have called it, a first principle, but, as Thomas-Fogiel stresses, such a first truth does not provide us with a first point of departure of a deduction.[19] Taken as such, or *schlechthin*, it precedes oppositionality, hence it precedes conceptual thought: "The absolute I of the first principle is not *something* (it has, and can have, no predicate); it is simply *what* its is, and this can be explained no further" (GWL 109 / 109). We can see how such an absolute I would lead to something like Schelling's *Ungrund.*[20] This seems to change Fichte's philosophy drastically. But it is hard to see how one could not be tempted to ask this question. The thing we are talking about is not something impartial to us. We are, after all, trying to understand how *our* experience may have come about. We are

19 *Op. cit.,* 74.
20 See Fichte: "*Hier gibt es keine Gründe; wir sind an der Grenze aller Gründe,*" Fichte as quoted from WLnm by Breazeale 1998, 605.

talking about *our* consciousness. How can we claim spontaneity of consciousness and not claim that this has an impact on reality, even if this reality is always understood as conceptually mediated? If my experience comes about spontaneously, then surely everyone's experience must be likewise understood?

3. Intellectual Intuition /2

Thomas-Fogiel relies on the strong distinction Fichte makes in "Chapter One" between the intuition and the concept of the I. Such conceptualisation reifies what is properly understood as conscious activity. "Chapter One" (together with the First and Second Introductions) is the first and only chapter of Fichte's "new presentation" of the *Wissenschaftslehre,* one of the only presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre* that was expressly written for and allowed in print. Sadly no other chapters were to follow it. In this chapter Fichte tries to bring the reader to a new understanding of him or herself. This first chapter asks the reader to "think the I" and ends with the realisation that thought is not some thing but an activity that is hard to capture in concepts. But this is only one step in what is a *series* of reflections. This becomes clear when the text is re-situated within the context of the *nova methodo* lectures with which is was contemporaneous.

In the article "Fichte’s Nova methodo Phenomenologica: On the methodological role of 'intellectual intuition' in the later Jena Wissenschaftslehre" Breazeale carefully distinguishes the different uses Fichte makes of intuition during the *nova methodo* period. First, he writes, there is the intellectual intuition of our own free nature

(*intellectuelle Anschauung* 1 or "iA1"). This is an intuition that is present within empirical or everyday consciousness.[21] We have seen how this notion was used in the debate with determinism. Something within us objects to the reduction of our self-experience to a mere interaction of things. This is the experience of freedom we find in ourself.

Second, is the intuition of "pure I-hood" as *Tathandlung* (iA2). Such an intuition is not actually present in consciousness but it is a necessary postulate in order to understand the possibility of experience.[22] We discussed above how the principle of spontaneous activity is properly first in the sense that whereas determinism can never explain consciousness, our principle will let us deduce the necessity of the thing. On the one hand an appeal is made to the experience of freedom, on the other hand this same freedom, here understood as spontaneous activity, is also a first truth that cannot be argued for from any other, more fundamental position. As a first indubitable or unmediated truth we may, therefore, still retain it as an *intuition* of I-hood.[23]

Third, is intuition as freely produced "fact of consciousness" (iA3).[24] Fichte, especially in the *nova methodo* period asks us to "think the I" and observe how we do this. Our mind jumps from A to B. If we attend to what happens in thought we become aware of its wavering, "floating" nature. Hence we must abstract from the normal,

21 Breazeale 1998, 594.

22 *Op. cit.* 595. Breazeale writes that in the *Tathandlung* "the identity of the I *precedes* its differentiation into a subject and an object of reflection" (*loc.cit*, emp. in original). As I have tried to demonstrate the only sense we should give to this notion of precedence is *not* a temporal but a transcendental type of precedence. Although it is a first principle, all effort must be made to understand such productive activity as *simultaneous* with, and thus nothing different from, the "production" of producer and product, of I and not-I.

23 The neo-Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain (albeit in discussion with Bergson, not Fichte) explains the notion of "philosophical intuition" as follows: "Let us add that the word *direct* knowledge may signify either *without an intermediary object first known* (for example, the apprehension of the intelligible realities proportionate to our intelligence), or *which does not result from a reasoning* (the perception of first principles, for example)", in 'Preface to the Second Edition' (1929) in *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism,* Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2007 [1929, 1913] after the 2nd edition, translated by M.L. Andison, 30n

24 Breazeale, *op. cit,* 596

practical use of our minds and this allows the intuition of the I. The I we find is not our individual, empirical I but a pure I; or rather, Breazeale claims, the more we abstract from our individual I, the more we will approach this pure I. This use of intuition directs the attention of consciousness unto itself, and is therefore a form of intellectual intuition, but, as Breazeale points out, “there is something deeply ambiguous, incomplete and merely transitional” about it.[25] We are asked to perform a series of actions, abstraction, and a redirecting of our attention, to pay attention to what happens when we do so; indeed it is a *Handlung*: a series of activities. What is thus produced is not an intuition of the I but a *concept* of the I. What Fichte explicitly asks us to do is to pay attention to *how* we do this: this use of intuition is thus a *methodological* one. Breazeale: "With this … we have … transported ourselves from the “ordinary” to the “transcendental” standpoint".[26]

The fourth use of intuition is first properly philosophical, writes Breazeale (iA4).[27] Where in iA3 we were merely asked to observe how one thinks oneself, we are now asked to attend, not only to the resulting concept of the I (iA3), but also the act of attending the construction thereof (i.e., to reflect on philosophy). The third use (iA3), as it were, allows us to become aware (in an act of intuition) of the absolute spontaneity of consciousness. The fourth use (iA4) is first properly philosophical in that it takes this as a point of departure for a philosophical analysis in order to see how this standpoint allows us to understand the "genesis" (Breazeale) of finite consciousness (limited I and limited not-I). iA3 thus brings us to the proper starting point for the

25 *Op. cit.,* 599
26 *Op. cit.,* 600.
27 *Op. cit.,* 601.

Wissenschaftslehre. "What the philosopher has to intuit is thus not *one act* (iA3) but the entire *series of acts* ensuing therefrom".[28]

What distinguishes Fichte's intuition of consciousness from a Cartesian one is that one not only places oneself in the proper state of mind and then observes what is going on, but that one must also to be aware of the act of abstraction that this entails. Hence, writes Breazeale, one does not commence with a naive Cartesian claim about the indubitability of the *cogito.*[29] Even more so, the raising of oneself to the transcendental or philosophical viewpoint must itself (i.e. the raising of oneself, this transition, this abstraction) be taken up in the meditation on knowledge.

Transcendental philosophy is immanent in that we are confined to the only experience available to us. Through a series of reflections we come to understand that experience is a spontaneous event. But this is a philosophical reflection. Such a reflection involves expression in concepts and this inevitably reifies and misportrays what we are trying to explain. We inadvertedly shift from one perspective to another, from a consideration of the conditions of experience to a description and / or affirmation of what takes place in experience. It is when we do not separate clearly between philosophical and empirical accounts that things go wrong. We are then led to think that a transcendental I exists in the interiority of our being, and that this might be exposed, in a real sense, through some reduction.

When we reflect on the conditions of experience we necessarily abstract from experience. When we do not pay proper attention to what this involves we might surreptitiously be lead to posit what we have thus abstracted as somehow existing on

28 *Op. cit.,* 602.
29 *Ibid*.

its own. We abstract a transcendental I, or a thing in itself, but then we forget that this is abstracted from something complete and concrete. Breazeale sometimes seems to incline this way.[30] Although we abstract from the particular objects of experience, we should be watchful of the category change entailed when we abstract the subject from its relation to objects (*viz* the "absolute" subject of the *Foundations)*. This "I in itself" is not a subject existing in abstraction from objects, but appears as we have seen, within a meditation on the spontaneous nature of experience as such. Although we may want to distinguish between a "transcendental field" and an I and not-I as perhaps contained within such a field, the two do not exist as such, but are two necessarily complementary ways of explaining a single and one thing.[31] Breazeale seems to recognise as much when towards the end of the article he notes that there might be "something fundamentally misguided about the operative premise of this paper: namely that one can somehow *separate* "intuiting" from "thinking" and develop a methodology of the former in isolation from the latter".[32] "Thinking" or experience is what takes place all by itself. "Intuiting" is the philosophical reflection on "thinking". But these two, as indeed Breazeale notes, are two components of the same. Although to reflect on our experience we abstract from particulars and use concepts, we must always be able to return to the concrete particular.

30 E.g. when he compares the abstraction that Fichte demands of us with Husserl's e*poché*. See *op. cit.,* 611.

31 This notion of a transcendental field has its own interesting history in 20th Century philosophy. As Goddard points out Deleuze in one of his very last texts "Immance: A Life" explicitely refers to Fichte's in order to understand this transcendental field as "life". For a discussion see J.-C. Goddard 2007a. See Deleuze "Immanence: A Life", in *Pure Immanence* (New York: Zone Books, 2001): 25-34.

32 Breazeale, *op. cit.,* 615.

4. Two viewpoints and two aspects

Fichte distinguishes between the viewpoint of life and the viewpoint of philosophy. This distinction is a philosophical distinction. Towards the end of Ch. II, Sect. 5 we discussed these two perspectives (the theoretical and the practical) in relation to what Fichte called the real and ideal grounds of activity. From the viewpoint of life I find myself in opposition to a world. I am aware of actively determining this world but also of the fact that this world determines me.[33] When I reflect on the conditions of such a dual relation I come to posit determination as a spontaneous phenomenon. This phenomenon I must try to express and to do so I will need to refer to the terms that the practical perspective has put at my disposal. It cannot be "the thing" which is the cause of such spontaneous determination because things only combine mechanically, and such a combination can only give us an aggregate. Hence I will call it I. The ground of determination lies in the self-determination of the I. The real ground for the determination by the I is the independent activity of the I.

Although determination as such is without ground or occurs in absolute spontaneity, in actual determination it consists of a determining pole and a determinate pole. For determination to be possible *as determination*, a distinction between an active and a passive side, or between an I and a not-I must be assumed. This I and not-I stand in a quantitative relation, the I negates the not-I when it determines the not-I, the not-I negates the I when it determines the I. This is the ideal ground of the passivity of the I. But the passivity of the I is not only a matter of degree but also a qualitative affair: the not-I is the real ground of the passivity or determination of the I. The not-I not only

33 Again we must keep the polyvalent meaning of the original term in mind. *Bestimmung* means determination and limitation but also destination and vocation. Furthermore it brings to mind voice (*Stimm*) and finding a voice for something.

resists my determination, but it even strives against me *(Widerstreben / Widerstand)*. Although determination as judgment, synthesis, or rule-giving, is not determined by material necessity, it cannot (without falling into transcendent idealism) by itself account for *that which* it determines. As Fichte noted, what occasions this is not something a theoretical reflection can account for. After much reflection we must finally admit that a purely theoretical exposition of the question of what, if anything, occasions or determines spontaneity cannot be answered to full satisfaction.

INTERMEZZO

1. From 1789 to 1889

To move from Fichte to Bergson is to take a leap in a number of senses. Not only are their personalities, their styles of writing and argumentation all very different. But the philosophical landscape, indeed the world itself, as it was at the end of the 19th Century no longer resembled the one from the 1790's. Just think of the collection of German lands that was to become the German state, or of Revolutionary France and the *Belle epoque* of the Third Republic. Or more fundamentally: the move to the cities, rapidly increasing industrialisation, increasing class-tensions, the rise of mass media and mass transport. Or yet philosophically more pertinent: the development from a genetic *philosophical* account of experience to a pluralistic scientific theory of evolution,[1] from a mechanistic-atomistic science to the theory of thermo-dynamics, think of the revolutions in mathematics, of experimental psychology, the theory of the electron.[2] Think finally of Schopenhauer, Stirner and Nietzsche, Maine de Biran and

1 See e.g., H. Müller-Sievers, *Self-generation, Biology, Philosophy and Literature around 1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) for a discussion of the relation between philosophy and evolution.

2 Much excellent work has been done on Bergson's relation to the sciences that I do not propose to repeat here, e.g. the work of Milič Čapek, Pete Gunter, Paul-Antoine Miquel and Keith Ansell-Pearson. For a good concise overview of some of these developments see Chapter II in Suzanne

Ravaisson. Where for Fichte and Kant there lay a real problem in conceiving living beings as effects that were the cause of themselves,[3] Darwin *et alia* had actually been able to *demonstrate* evolution as fact. It would not be an exaggeration to say that at the end of the 19th Century everything was in movement.[4]

Before we leave behind the Jena of the 1790's to travel to the France of the 1890's I would like to discuss one such set of changing concepts, namely the related concepts of force, energy, *Kraft* and *Wirkung*. As we have seen Fichte ambiguates between a transcendental inquiry into the conditions of knowledge and an understanding of the world in terms of activity. When I initially came to read the *Foundations* it was Bergson who was guiding me through this text. I was struck by Fichte's sophisticated use of various notions of activity and its parallels with Bergson's own work. Initially I had thought to juxtapose Fichte and Bergson precisely on this understanding of reality in terms of activity. Fichte speaks of activity and passivity, of rest, of resistance and such an understanding of reality we can also see in Bergson's *Matter and Memory* and *Creative Evolution.* Bergson speaks of the reality of movement, of different rhythms of duration, of the spiritual and the material as being inverse degrees of each other. But he also speaks of the spiritual and the material as striving to undo each others work. Hence the parallels are clearly there. But as I continued reading Fichte I saw that this only does justice to one aspect of his thought, a thought, furthermore, that was not really seen as two for him. I thus came to stress more strongly the transcendental aspect of his project.

Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

3 As witnessed in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment.*

4 The scientific interest in movement is captured beautifully in the photographs of Étienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904). See Georges Didi-Huberman and Laurent Mannoni, *Mouvements de l'air. Étienne-Jules Marey, photographe des fluides* (Gallimard, 2004). Didi-Huberman explicitly links Marey's work to Bergson.

As we have come to see, Fichte's thought does not clearly distinguish between an understanding of experience in terms of a spontaneous act of synthesis and an understanding of reality that as such is composed of degrees of activity. It is from only our vantage point that these are first seen as two different strands. Whether much has been gained by this often rigorous distinction remains to be seen. Although we will return to this issue at the Conclusion of this thesis, it might therefore be useful to reflect on the concept of activity. What for Fichte *could not* have been understood as an actual description of the state of the world and had to remain part hypothesis, was much less problematic to affirm for Bergson.

2. *Kraft* and *Wirkung*

When Fichte tries to reformulate transcendental philosophy to bring out the primacy of practical reason a whole set of terms are introduced to "activize" reason: *Tätigkeit* and *Selbsttätigkeit, Handlung* and *Tathandlung*, *Streben* and *Gegenstreben*, *Anstoß* and *Ruhe, Wille*, *Trieb*, *Wechsel, Wechseltun, Wechselwirkung, Kraft, Wirkung* and *Wirksamkeit*. Where most of these terms may be translated into English without too much trouble, it is the tandem *Kraft* and *Wirkung* that poses a real problem for translation. A common translation using terms of Latin origin is as "force" or "power" and "effect". *Wirkung* may also be translated somewhat awkwardly with "working out", as work being done (from *wirken,* to work). What is truly difficult to render in modern English is the inner relation that *Kraft* and *Wirkung* have and that the Latin force and effect do not. In a very illuminating entry on *force* in the *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies* Françoise

Balibar discusses the difference between the German terms and their Latin counterparts. That there is a real conceptual difference between force and *Kraft* may be deduced from a recent article by Howard Caygill called “Life and Energy”. In that article, which we will discuss later on, Caygill advocates the concept of energy over the “anachronistic and conceptually limited” concepts of force and power.[5]

The German language, Balibar writes, has a word to refer to the actualisation of a power and this is the word *Wirkung*. There is something specific to the related terms *Kraft* and *Wirkung* that is lost in French, and by association in English. This first became noticeable when Leibniz, who of course was a German, was writing in French about *force* and *acte*. This link between *force* and *acte* was not at all apparent to the French reader.[6] Why would a force have to act, why would it have to have efficacy? The same problem we may see appearing with the concept of energy. Why would energy have to spend itself? Can’t it just remain as it is? That this is a problem for “force” and “energy” and not for *Kraft* has to do with the relation these terms entertain with the mediating concept of conservation or maintenance, in German *Erhaltung*.

In the history of thought concerning the nature of energy, force, and *Kraft*, the term “energy” has, as Balibar notes, fairly recently undergone a process of complete de-naturalisation.[7] Energy is not spent but is said to be passed on from action to action. It conserves itself, which means that energy remains constant. The conservation (Fr: *conservation*) of energy is an idea that was definitively introduced in 1847 by Hermann von Helmholtz in his *Über die Erhaltung der Kraft*: in a closed system energy is a constant value. But as the English translation of the title indicates, the notion of a

5 Howard Caygill, "Life and Energy," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26 (6) (2007).
6 Françoise Balibar, “Force,” in *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies* (Le Robert, 2004), 462.
7 *Op. cit.,* 458.

value-constant energy entails a drastic conceptual shift. The *Erhaltung* of *Kraft* becomes the *conservation* of *energy*. Where conservation seems to entail the idea that energy preserves itself and is only divided or changes location, *Erhaltung* also has the more active sense of upholding itself (Fr: *entretenir* - to "entertain"). In the context of *Erhaltung,* energy that is *not* maintained spends itself. *Kraft* in relation to *Wirkung* "acts itself out", or is productive, whereas energy is said to simply pass from one object to the next object, without any (qualitative) alteration to itself. In this sense, as Balibar points out, *Kraft* is related to substance, as that which maintains itself.[8] *Kraft* is internal to substance and is opposed to inertia, which is external rather than internal. The "working out" of force, its *Wirkung,* is both a spending of itself (consumption) and, in producing work (e.g., heat), results in maintaining itself as body. Such maintenance is not given automatically but is an active process. It has to work actively to maintain itself against the external force of inertia. In a language of energy, in contradistinction, it is said to maintain or rather, conserve itself automatically, unless it is altered (but only quantitatively so: division, relocation) under the influence of some other energy.

The problem for a genetic account of existence is that energy can only give us quantitative difference. It divides, recombines, changes location, but the sum total remains the same. Energy is fundamentally a mechanistic concept. Energy and what, as it were, "holds" this energy relate to one another as power and manifestation, with the manifestation external to power and unable to influence it in any qualitative manner. We then have to ask why energy changes. The problem becomes even more apparent when we attempt to combine this law of conservation (the first law) with what is known as the second law of thermo-dynamics, one formulated at around the same

8 *Op. cit.,* 462.

time.[9] In *Creative Evolution* Bergson discusses the problem that this combination encounters. The law of conservation, he writes, is a quantitative law, which states that in a closed system energy remains constant. Even if all the forms of energy could be measured in the same way, this still would not amount to more than an expression of the fact that *something* within a system is preserved in constant quantity. When this law is then extended to the universe it is no longer able to express the objective permanence of a certain quantity within a system, since the answer to the question of whether the universe as such is a closed-system or not cannot simply be assumed. “Rather [the second law expresses] the necessity for every change that is brought about to be counterbalanced in some way by a change in an opposite direction. That is to say, even when it governs the whole of our solar system, the law of the conservation of energy is concerned with the relationship of a fragment of this world to another fragment rather than with the nature of the whole” (EC 701 / 156). The second law, the law of the degradation of physical changes into heat and a uniform distribution of heat among bodies, is of a different order. This, Bergson writes, is “the most metaphysical of the laws of physics” (*ibid.*). It tells us that “visible and heterogeneous changes” will be diluted in to “invisible and homogeneous” ones. This clearly does concern a qualitative affair. How now to account for such qualitative change? For Bergson it is clear that the scientist cannot account for qualitative change as long as he remains commited to the idea that “energy is attached to extended particles”, that is, to a merely quantitative concept of energy (EC 702 / 157).

9 Rudolf Clausius first formulated the second law in 1850 in his article "Über die bewegende Kraft der Wärme", although it is commonly traced back to the work of Nicolas Sadi Carnot (1762-1832).

Kraft and *Wirkung*, however, do stand in a reciprocal relation. The "presence" if you will, or the actuality of *Kraft* consists of a "working-out", it spends itself, it undergoes a qualitative change. In the chapters on Fichte we may well understand the *Tathandlung* in such a way (hence the importance of the complementary non-transcendental account of his thought). As we have seen, it is *neither* agent and action, and *both* agent and action combined. Since its essence consists of a "working-out" (as "performative activity" or *Tathandlung*) it "results" in a determining pole and a determined pole (agent and action, I and not-I). We may consider it as activity *schlechthin,* thus abstracting from the related notions of agent and action, and then it may be said to be "absolute" and "without lack" (hence neither agent nor action). If we subsequently substantialise what is in fact an abstraction of activity considered *as activity schlechthin* we may well end up with the mere formulaic and purely abstract concept of energy. But as we have seen, once abstracted, we should then be careful to re-situate it in that what it does, i.e., its "working out".

Would we be able to find traces of *Kraft* and *Wirkung* in the English language? The "archaic" concept of force (Caygill) is indeed quite old and has, like the terms of the *Foundations* that we mentioned above, anthropomorphic roots. With "striving", "will" and "drive" this is clear. *Handlung* refers to the operations of the hand, *Wirkung* to work. And even *Kraft* probably finds its origin in the "*krafts des armes*", in its original meaning of the force of the hand.[10] *Kraft* probably derives from *graph*, in German: *fassen, greifen*, traces of which we find in the English to grab*,* to grasp, and older still, to grope. *Kraft* may thus be linked to *Begriff* or concept. Another possible and related origin is found in *crapft*, meaning hook (Ger: *Gabel,* think perhaps also of "crab"), the

10 For this and the following see the lemma *Kraft* in Grimm and Grimm (1854-1960)

hand as a hook or grip to grab something. The word *Kraft* can still be found in the English language today, in the word “craft”. This word originally meant force, strength and power in the same way that *Kraft* does in the German language. The word “craft” as force or power equally refered to human, skilful work and for a long time was used interchangeably with “art”, which did not have the present limited sense of artistic, aesthetic work but as that what was made by human hands and also the ways in which it was made.

Although etymologically the anthropomorphic sense of craft and force seems to be more original, or at least more old,[11] Caygill, for one, feels that it is precisely for this reason that a de-naturalised concept of energy is to be prefered. In the article "Life and Energy" Caygill explicitly sides with “energy” over the “archaic” and “conceptually limited” concept of force.[12] But what he laments is the division of the concept of energy into separate physical and physiological dimensions. As he notes, if “energy” is to be linked conceptually to “life” then such a division must be overcome. He then proposes the notion of “work” as a way to bridge the two.[13] But where “work” and “energy” seem to have little in common, such a relation is precisely what is the case in the “anthropomorphic” notions of *Kraft* and *Wirkung*.

11 What is interesting to note is that, based on citations in the *Oxford English Dictionary,* this word “craft” appears in fact to be much older than the word “force” that in time has come to supplant it. References as early as 888, 893 and 897 are mentioned in the OED whereas the earliest mention of “force” stem from 1300 and 1303. Energy is first mentioned in 1585.
12 Caygill 2007, 19.
13 *Op. cit.,* 20.

3. Fichte and Bergson, *Tathandlung* and *élan vital*

Philosophical-historical order aside, there are two good reasons why it was useful to study Fichte's philosophy prior to the study of Bergson. First of all, Fichte presents his entire argument within one single work. We were therefore able to present the argument in a more succinct form. As we shall see when we now turn to Bergson, the argument (to the extent that I attempt to juxtapose the two philosophers) is one that does not fully unfold until his third major work *Creative Evolution*. We will have to take our time to study the two preceding works *Time and Free Will* and *Matter and Memory.* Second, Fichte presents the argument in an almost purely abstract manner. This clearly allowed for a condensed presentation of the argument but it also helps us see more clearly the philosophical and conceptual problems this entails. In contrast, Bergson always attempts to unravel a certain specific and rather concrete problem that appears within a certain specific scientific context (e.g., the nature of conscious states, of memory, or of evolution). This complements well the abstract philosophy of Fichte. But Bergson's approach does seem to subordinate the philosophical account to the elaboration of the chosen problem. Nowhere does this become more apparent than in what is ultimately the main text for our juxtaposition of Bergson and Fichte, *Creative Evolution*. As I have already hinted Bergson needs to reconcile a metaphysical account of reality as composed of different degrees or rhythms with an account that shows a vital difference between the organised and the unorganised. That "inversion" and "interruption", the two terms used to refer to these two competing claims are not, or at least not in any unproblematic sense, "synonymous", as Bergson claims on numerous instances, could lead the reader to think that either there is no problem, or, what would

be worse, that indeed there is a problem, but that Bergson was unable to address it. But there both *is* a problem with these terms *and* Bergson *is* aware of it. Indeed, the entire work may be seen as an attempt to deal with this problem. But Bergson, and this is rather typical of him, chose not to discuss it explicitely and independently. As we will come to see, most notably in Chapter VI, this problem of inversion and interruption has troubled a number of commentators. However, the precise philosophical reason why this problem appears and what makes it so difficult to deal with is generally left undiscussed. The chapters on Fichte make clear that a perfectly unified account is not a possibility, but that different modes of thought will have to be distinguished. Ultimately we will come to see why Bergson too is forced to make such a distinction.

For us the challenge not to lose our bearings in Fichte's abstract arguments, and not to get stuck in Bergson's rather more concrete and implicit philosophy. Clearly the two reasons may also be seen to speak precisely for Bergson. His philosophy is more carefully developed, it is linked to issues everyone can relate to and furthermore he was able to make good use of many of the advancements of the 19th Century. Fichte could not yet have unequivocally assume a difference between what Bergson will call that which “makes itself" (*se faisant*) and the "ready-made." But for Bergson time itself must be seen as durational and the problem becomes one of how to account for this in a conceptual languague only suited to “solids”. Few other philosophers have devoted so much of their philosophy to a proper understanding of what it means to say that experience is spontaneous or durational. The rigorous and abstract philosophy of Fichte and Bergson's agile and concrete one will ultimately move beyond juxtaposition in order to fuse or "interpenetrate".

Before turning to our study of Bergson, I will briefly indicate how Fichte's philosophy may be of help in our reading of Bergson. Fichte starts immediately with transcendental synthesis, conceived as self-positing or *Tathandlung* and without any elaboration as to why we would want to do so. This is why I have situated his argument within an overall project of providing an alternative to determinism. Bergson initially starts more modestly. In *Time and Free Will* he wants to do justice to the specificity of the organisation of conscious states. He demonstrates that such states will invariably be misrepresented when conceived of in a spatial manner, that is, as distinct entities that recombine in quasi-mechanistic manner. He then proposes an alternative account and this is the concept of duration. Here he seems content to simply have two distinct organisational principles, duration and space. As we shall come to see this leads to the problem of how to account for the phenomenon of movement as this is something that partakes of both space and duration. He is thus forced to rethink the two principles and how they may be seen to combine. *Matter and Memory* first gives us the solution to this problem. Duration and space are inverse degrees of each other and the concept of memory is said to incorporate both. But as we shall come to see memory *is* duration. Although the two are different principles, space is secondary in relation to duration, now affirmed as something that with Fichte we could say is an absolute and unconditional principle. All reality is movement and movement is of the order of duration.

Fichte posits *Tathandlung* as first principle. Such a principle by itself assumes positing and counterpositing, activity and passivity, determination and determinate being. It is a first principle because only on the basis of it can we understand

oppositionality and determinate being. Speaking with Bergson, only on the basis of spontaneous or durational organisation can we understand the different degrees of reality. But the first principle is also part of the distinction (as activity, as determination) and as such of equal worth as a principle of determinate being. The two sides form a continuity: they are inverse degrees of each other; they stand in reciprocal determination. But then the question of their qualitative difference returns: one side resists the other. Fichte thus appeals to "independent activity" or to a qualitative difference between activity and resistance.

When Bergson, in *Matter and Memory,* has shown how quality and quantity, duration and space and freedom and necessity may all be understood as diverging tendencies of what Deleuze has called "one tremendous memory", the problem of the qualitative difference between life and death or the "organised" and the "unorganised" reappears. Although duration and space may be seen as inverse degrees of each other, this cannot be said for the organised and the unorganised. In *Creative Evolution* Bergson must now reconcile two competing claims: spirituality and materiality are "inverse degrees", yet and at the same time, the one "interrupts" the other: spirituality aims to "undo" the work of materiality and *vice versa*. This problem of reconciling two conflicting demands is not made explicit by Bergson, who prefers to speak of the two terms (inversion and interruption) as being synonymous. Yet he does offer a solution to this problem and this will consist of an (again mostly left implicit) appeal to two forms of understanding or two attitudes: One that is the privilege of philosophy, the other a more "vital" or practical one, or again as the opposition of contemplation and action. To the extent that the problem can ever be solved, this will not consist in dissolving one

perspective in the other, but to increase our attentiveness to a constant shifting from one perspective to the other. Each perspective has its strengths and shortcomings; it is when their are confused that a whole host of false problems start to appear. The same we have seen with Fichte. He too constantly had to move from one perspective to another.

What this shows is that this is inherent in any attempt that tries to explain experience by appealing only to what may be found in experience, that is, to any transcendental philosophy. That Bergson is forced to bring in a distinction between contemplation and action shows that his project too may ultimately be considered a kind of transcendental philosophy, in the sense of having had to incorporate a reflection on the limitations of philosophy as such. Whereas with Fichte the transcendental aspect could not be separated from a more vital or active account, with Bergson this vital account must be situated within a transcendental one.

One last remark before we turn to Bergson. The analysis in this thesis only extends to *Creative Evolution* (1907). Part of the reason is one of economy. To have also included the latter works, especially *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932), would not have allowed for the minimum of rigour required in terms of textual analysis. But this choice is not merely arbitrary. As Frédéric Worms notes in his excellent *Bergson ou les deux sens de la vie* the problem finds its "theoretical solution" with *Creative Evolution*. This is the problem of the unity and duality of duration and space (and I add, of action and contemplation). What does change is the "practical significance" and "metaphysical import" of this solution. Religious and moral experience, the subject matter of the *Two Sources*, allows us, as Worms writes, to

become aware of the dual "sense" of life within us.[14] This is itself a properly moral and religious experience. Now, a comparable problem posed itself in our study of Fichte. Fichte too is a highly moral thinker. We have seen that at crucial moments he appeals to "practical understanding" in order to explain, as it were, the givenness of spontaneous experience. There is a "shock" that calls forth "infinite striving". To what extent theoretical understanding may fathom this we have left undetermined. In this thesis I want to show the *philosophical* problem that appears when we take seriously the spontaneous nature of experience. As we shall see, for Bergson too, this problem leads to a meditation on the relation of philosophy *to* life. This, in my mind, is as much a problem for philosophy as it is for the philosopher (i.e., extra-philosophical). In this thesis I have limited myself to merely pointing towards this nexus of problems, rather than attempting to address the question: why philosophise? and it is for this reason that neither Fichte's, nor Bergson's ethical and moral philosophy is discussed in this thesis.

14 See Frédéric Worms, *Bergson ou les deux sens de la vie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004), 18.

Part II: Bergson

IV. TWO FORMS OF ORGANISATION

1. The problem of free will and determinism

In his doctoral thesis *Time and Free Will* (1889) Bergson attempts to unravel the age-old conflict of freedom and determinism. He hopes that if he can dispel the many misunderstandings that surround this conflict the problem of freedom will disappear. With this problem removed we may then see appearing a more true sense of freedom (DI, 3 / xx). The book is thus of two parts, one part that will critique the common concepts of freedom, and one part that will aim to introduce this new understanding of freedom. This same format we will also find in his later works. First a critique of the way a certain specific phenomenon has been understood (generally within the sciences), then an appeal to our own lived experience to see whether we feel that this experience is properly portrayed and then finally an attempt to formulate a more positive account of our experience.

In *Time and Free Will* the specific phenomenon Bergson will discuss is the alleged measurability of conscious states and the implied reduction of these states to the stimuli received by the mind. The specific type of determinism he will attack was the then

current school of Psychophysics. If conscious states may be measured and reduced to stimuli then clearly freedom of the will would be impossible. Bergson will criticize the idea of measurement to show on what assumptions it rests. He will then contrast these assumptions with what we learn when we observe our minds closely. This will lead him to the quite novel conclusion that the way conscious states are organised differs radically from the way that measurable phenomena are said to be organised. These two forms of organisation Bergson calls duration and space, and we will discuss this in detail. Because conscious states have a different form of organisation measurement inadvertently changes or misrepresents their nature.

The perspective of duration thus allows him to criticize determinism, to the extent that it claims to apply to conscious phenomena, but also allows him to undermine the assumptions of the advocates of free will. In fact, Bergson will come to reject both determinism and the idea of free will. He will show that both determinism and free will have failed to understand the organisation of conscious states. Furthermore, this is to misunderstand the true nature of time. Time should not be seen as a linear and homogeneous progression with an equivalence of past, present and future. Bergson's strongest claim is that we have always confused real time with space. Real time is duration, whereas linear and homogeneous time is a mixture of duration with space. It is this assumption that is shared by both determinism and free will and it is from this newly opened perspective that a true sense of freedom may start to appear.[1]

1 Hence some readers are left puzzled by the authorised translation of the original French title *An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (though retained as subtitle) to *Time and Free Will*. Bergson rejects both our common understanding of time and our common understanding of free will. The two terms of the title thus only offer a negative indication of the contents. Bergson, as son of an English mother, was fluent in English (as well as a number of other languages). We benefit enormously from the fact that Bergson scrupulously checked and authorised the translations of all his mayor works. Combined with the already very lucid style of writing and the very low level of rhetoric found therein, makes that there are very few problems of translation. As for the title, one may assume that the publisher found this commercially more appealing than the original.

2. The measurability of conscious states

Bergson objects to the conclusion that because psychic states may be reduced to stimulus they as a result would allow for measurment (see DI, 42ff / 60ff). Psychophysics claimed that the intensity of psychic states varies with the intensity of stimuli received and because such stimuli allow for measurement, we may determine the magnitude of the intensity of psychic states. This notion of the intensive magnitude of psychic states Bergson will show to be a false mixture of two forms of organisation, one pertaining to measurable and external events, the other to internal events that are non-quantitative, non-spatial, hence non-measurable. Whereas external stimuli do allow for measurement it is precisely the absence of externality characteristic of psychic events that makes any straightforward and adequate measurement of them impossible.

The notion of the intensive magnitude of psychic states entails their reduction to the magnitude of external stimuli. These stimuli can be measured and they have an undeniable effect on conscious states. Although a correspondence between the two series can be shown, this does not of itself prove that the effect of stimuli on conscious states is one that can be determined. We may claim that conscious states are influenced (indeed even allow for 100 percent influence) by external stimuli, but if we want to be able to show precisely how a stimulus determines a conscious state some kind of measurable effect is required. Rather than assuming that influence equates determinability, we will have to inquire whether measurability as such is permitted when speaking of psychic states. Measurement must be understood as a way of

organising experience. To determine whether measurement may be faithfully applied to conscious states we will have to ask whether the form of organisation proper to measurement is adequate to the form of organisation proper to conscious states. This question is still relevant today. Although our techniques of measurement are infinitely more refined, the mere fact of a correspondence of an increase in brain-activity with certain stimuli or experiences does not by itself settle the question to what extent or how the one determines the other. General determinability may be claimed, or a regular occurring correspondence, but the question of specific determinability yet to be demonstrated.

Measurement generally consists of comparing two instances of a type with one instance taken as standard. The difference between the two may then be expressed in terms of different ratios of the standard. This kind of measurement is difficult to apply to psychic states. If this were to be an external standard of conscious states (i.e., as shared amongst individuals) we would have to be able to determine that what, for instance, I find painful and what you find painful are also objectively equally painful. We cannot appeal here to the intensity of the stimulus itself as we are concerned with the conscious or psychic aspect of the experience. An internal standard (i.e., one that applies to one person) may work in terms of an expression of higher or lower intensity of experience but such a standard is unreliable because it depends on comparing a memory of a previous experience with an experience I have now. We would then have to develop an quantitative theory that allows us to express remembered experiences in proportion to actual experiences.[2] If we want to avoid this problem we would have to imagine the possibility of having two experiences at the same time and in such a way

2 Bergson's next work *Matter and Memory* will take up precisely this issue.

that the one experience in no way influences the other experience. Although it is not hard to imagine two simultaneous experiences, it is difficult to see how precisely we may claim that having experience A conjoint with B, or having A with C in no way alters the experience of A itself. To determine experience A (and not merely A in relation to B) we would have to determine its intensity in relation to all imaginable experiences. More problematic still: it assumes the divisibility of conscious states.

2.1 Psychophysics

The theory of Psychophysics tried to circumvent these problems by focussing on the measurement of received stimuli. Let us assume stimulus E and corresponding sensation S. If we increase E with dE Psychophysics claims that we will see an increase of S_0 with dS, thus arriving at S_1. Although this might not directly give us an exact measure of dS, we assume a certain magnitude for dS and that perhaps one day, with the advent of something like neuroscience, we might be able to determine its magnitude. But, Bergson asks, if dS is what is said to lie between S_0 and S_1, what sense are we to make of such an interval; what is it that lies between S_0 and S_1 (see DI 46 / 66)? Do we ever experience any such interval between two sensations? And say that we do, would this not rather be a new and different sensation, an $S_{1/2}$? So that we would have to ask again, what lies between S_0 and $S_{1/2}$? Does it not make more sense to say that my sensations form a continuous and unbroken chain? But then what are we to make of the idea of an interval lying between S_0 and S_1? One might want at this point to compare psychic states to points strung along a line; something both continuous and made up of different points. For Bergson this would beg the question. If it were possible

to represent psychic states in a spatial medium then we would certainly be able to compare the different states. This, however, remains to be determined. As Bergson will aim to demonstrate, it is precisely by allowing psychic states to be represented in a spatial medium that the notion of a magnitude for psychic states may first be formulated.

Perhaps we could speak of an increase in intensity in the sense of a growing dominance of the sensation within us (*op. cit.* 27 / 35). This growing dominance could then be seen as the gradual absorption of different facets of my psychic life within the one sensation. The difference between irritation, anger and rage could thus be taken to imply that, whereas irritation is just one sensation amongst others, when we are in a state of rage the sensation has incorporated nearly all facets of my being. What we thus need to determine is whether these facets that together compose psychic life are of an order that can be counted and measured.

2.2 Numbers: continuous and discrete

After having considered a plethora of psychic phenomena in Chapter I Bergson now turns, in Chapter II, to investigate what it means to count and whether psychic states can be counted in the same way. It is here that he discovers that the way we count with numbers is not the same as how we would count psychic states. When we count with numbers these numbers are taken as discrete elements that can be added and divided at will. Whether we divide any number by 8, then multiply it by 16 and then divide it by 2, or multiply it by 2, divide it by 10 at multiply it by 5, it does not make any difference, we end where we started from. What Bergson notes is that a number is both

a unit and a collection of units, or rather, a synthesis of the one and the many, and that it is this that allows us to manipulate numbers. Yet Bergson asks, "is the word *unit* taken in the same sense in both cases?" (54 / 80).

What Bergson has noticed is that numbers have a strange capacity to be both discrete and continuous. They are continuous in the sense of infinite divisibility. This, for Bergson, reveals that we take numbers to be a kind of spatial object (54 / 79). The progression of numbers we imagine as an uninterrupted line, with the numbers themselves as points along this line. When we manipulate numbers we take them as spatial or extended object, but when we are done with them, when the outcome has been determined, they return to positions along the line. This difference, Bergson claims, is due to a difference in attention we give to number in its finished state and number in the process of formation (56 / 82).

That numbers are both continuous and discrete is the result, so Bergson claims, of a difference in the attention we pay to numbers when actively manipulating them and when considered as the result of manipulation. For Bergson tese two types of attention are equally two specific types of organisation, namely the "subjective" and the "objective", or what he will later come to refer to as duration and space. When we manipulate numbers we assume their infinite divisibility and hence the sequence of numbers is understood to be continuous. This continuity and infinite divisibility of numbers, Bergson claims, is a result of, or dependent on, the *continuity* of *conscious activity* during the *process* of manipulation. But when numbers are considered under an ordinal aspect we represent them as so many points strung along a line. This rather unexpected conclusion we will discuss in detail presently. What we may already see is

that for Bergson conscious states may be considered a kind of sequence, but this is a continuous sequence. This continuous series of conscious states is then mixed with a spatial schema, which essentially is one of mutual externality. When we take numbers to be infinitely divisible we model this on the continuity we know from our own conscious states. The mutual externality of the schema of space comes in when we try to order the progression of numbers.

3. Two multiplicities

Let us read the passage where Bergson distinguishes between the subjective and the objective. This is a complex passage not often commented on, but it is well worth discussing in detail because it offers great insight into Bergson's latter distinction of duration and space.

> [W]e apply the term *subjective* to what seems to be completely and adequately known, and the term *objective* to what is known in such a way that a constantly increasing number of new impressions could be substituted for the idea we actually have of it. Thus, a complex feeling will contain a fairly large number of simple elements; but, as long as these elements do not stand out with perfect clearness, we cannot say that they were completely realized, and, as soon as consciousness has a distinct perception of them, the psychic state which results from their synthesis will have changed for this very reason. But there is no change in the general appearance of a body, however it is analysed by thought, because these different analyses, and an infinity of others, are already visible in the mental image which we form of the body, though they are not realized: this actual and not merely virtual perception of subdivisions in what is undivided is just what we call objectivity (57 / 83-4).

The “objective” pertains to external objects. The objectivity of objects consists in the fact that although we may come to know more and more about an object we do not assume that the object itself has changed, rather it is our knowledge of the object that has changed. The “general appearance of a body” does not change when we come to know more about it. An external object contains a vast number of aspects and of some aspects we are aware and of others not. The aspects we are not aware of, i.e., things we do not yet know, Bergson writes, are “already visible in the mental image” we have of the object, though these not yet “realised”. This means that these aspects are entertained as possible aspects of a future awareness. We assume such aspects to exist independently of our awareness of them yet they are already part of, or “already visible in”, the idea we have of the object. What lacks is not existence but their realisation for us in an awareness of them.

The “subjective” pertains to internal or psychic states. A psychic state is equally a complex entity consisting of a number of aspects or elements, some known, and some that “do not stand out with perfect clearness”. But when we become aware of these “unclear” elements something happens that does not happen to “objective” objects or elements: the “psychic state which results from their synthesis” *changes as a result* of it. Whereas the “synthesis” or “mental image”, the representation of a body, that is, does not change under the influence of the “realisation”, or awareness of elements contained within it, awareness of certain aspects of a psychic state or complex *does* change the overall picture of it.

Let me use an example to explain this a bit more clearly. Imagine you are trying to determine your feelings for someone. These feelings, we could say, consists of a

complex of elements, some clear to the mind, some a bit vague. Reflecting on what this person means to you should help you attain more clarity as to what is important and what is not. This involves evaluation, observation and comparison of the "elements" it contains. Now, if done in an honest and faithful way such a reflection should not lead you to conjure up things that were not there to start with and it should not fundamentally change the feelings you have for that person and but it will inevitably have changed your attitude towards, or appreciation of, that person. You will come to see more clearly what you appreciate about this person and what you do not. If this were all Bergson wanted to say then one could retort that a similar process might well take place with external objects. A reflection will always bring out what was before only present in a confused state. But Bergson claims that it is not simply our awareness of the vague elements of a psychic states that becomes more clear, the elements of the state themselves change in this process of reflection. A clearly perceived psychic element is no longer the same as the previously only vaguely perceived element. This in turn has an effect on the whole of which they are part.

The interesting difference between the objective and the subjective orders concerns the ontological status of elements prior to their realisation. Objective elements, prior to realisation, are "already visible" in the mental image. Such elements, Bergson says, are not yet realised, yet they are *actual*. Subjective elements, prior to realisation, are, on the contrary, *virtual*. Deleuze explains this difference between the actual and the virtual by bringing in second distinction between the possible and the virtual.[3] An objective element is either possible or it "realised," but in both cases it is actual. That is, we assume it to already exist independent of our awareness of it. A

3 See Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Tomlinson, H. (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 95-8.

subjective element is either virtual or it is realised but between these two states there is a crucial difference. When an objective or possible element is realised through an awareness of it, this consists of an uncovering of something already present; as Deleuze writes, a limitation is removed and existence is merely "added" to it. Therefore, it does not change the “mental image” we have of the object in question.[4] But when a subjective or virtual element is realised this results in a qualitative change of the psychic state. Its realisation is properly a “making real”, without that this implies a preceding non-existence. A virtual element does not exist in some pre-formed state but neither is it wholly without existence. In the formula of Proust that Deleuze approvingly cites: it is “real without being actual, ideal without being abstract.”[5]

There are elements of an objective object we do not know but that we know to exist (e.g. the dark side of the moon), and of which we would become aware if we were to construct some device (a spaceship for instance). The moon itself we take to remain unchanged throughout this process. But how I see someone and what I think about this person cannot be detached from what I take to be his good and bad qualities. Although we do not say that he is now someone else, a physically different person, in reflecting on what this person means to me my idea of him has changed. This change would not have come about without this reflection. Although another change could have taken place, this would have entailed a different reflection. That I evaluated his good and bad qualities in *this way* results in me perceiving him in *this specific way*. Had I evaluated things differently, or under a different set of conditions, then my idea of him would equally have been a different one. The more I see what his good and bad qualities are, the more clearly I know what to think of him. This, in fact, is a two-way process: a

4 *Op. cit.,* 97.
5 *Op. cit.,* 96.

more clear view of his qualities gives a clearer overall view, and the more clear my overall view, the more I will be able to discern what the relevant qualities are. How I evaluate things and under which conditions together determine the outcome, hence such determination can never be done under abstraction from its specific conditions. But the outcome of the evaluation equally helps me to return to the evaluation of the elements because I now know more clearly what is important and what not.

Bergson will return to the two forms of knowing in *Matter and Memory*. There he writes that we may either consider the intellectual process as purely mechanical; as simply a (contingent) series of successive additions. Or we may consider it as a "circuit". Here "an act of concentration implies such a well-closed solidarity between the mind and its object (...) that we cannot pass to states of higher concentration without creating, whole and entire, so many new circuits which envelop the first" (MM 249 / 104). Reflection is a circuit that runs between elements and their synthesis, going from one to the other and back again. The outcome of the reflection results from the specific synthesis of the elements; a synthesis in which all elements are constantly taken up. The synthesis depends on its elements but which elements are to be part of it equally depends on the synthesis itself. Hence neither side pre-exists the other. As Deleuze writes, whereas the possible is subject to the rule of resemblance and limitation, the virtual has a rule of difference and creation.[6] The possible already resembles its realisation and this realisation is a removal of a limitation, an uncovering as we have said, or an addition of existence. But because in the realisation of the virtual the parts and whole do not pre-exist each other this is properly a creative process, a becoming

6 Deleuze 1988, 97.

different, or as Bergson says, a qualitative differentiation (DI, 64 / 95). The one then concerns discovery, the other is properly invention.

Although we will need to further clarify this difference between the actual and the virtual, we may now understand why Bergson writes that it is the subjective that can be “completely and adequately known”, whereas the objective only allows for infinite approximation (“a constantly increasing number of new impressions could be substituted for the idea we have of it”). This must have seemed counter-intuitive at first. Objective knowledge surely is more adequate or precise than subjective knowledge. But what Bergson has in mind is the parts to whole relation. The objectivity of the determination of an external object consists precisely in a certain resistance on the part of the object. Our limited, human, understanding of the world is always open to further precision and determination. Yet the determination of the subjective is intimately related to the specific conditions of this determination. It is because we have realised such and such subjective elements that we end up with this specific synthesis. Other elements would have resulted in a different synthesis, but it would have been equally adequate.

That subjective knowledge is adequate and complete knowledge might lead one to assume that Bergson merely affirms a quite traditional privileged access to the mental. To some extent this is probably correct and it was certainly of less concern to Bergson than it may be to us. Indeed the precise role of the distinction between the two orders is left, as Worms notes, "in the dark".[7] But although it seems to be merely a distinction between the privileged intimacy of mental states versus an ultimately never fully knowable external world, this is not the importance of the distinction. Rather, as

7 Worms, 2004, 47.

Deleuze notes, it concerns two forms of multiplicity, or better still, two types of organisation. As Deleuze writes, commenting on the exact same passage:

> [There] is a multiplicity of exteriority, of simultaneity, of juxtaposition, of order, of quantitative differentiation, of *difference in degree*; it is a numerical multiplicity, *discontinuous and actual*. The other type of multiplicity appears in pure duration: It is an internal multiplicity of succession, of fusion, of organization, of heterogeneity, of qualitative discrimination, or of *difference in kind*; it is a *virtual and continuous* multiplicity that cannot be reduced to numbers.[8]

3.1 Duration and *Tathandlung*

The specific relations that hold between the elements of a multiplicity and the multiplicity itself, or, as in our example, between the things I highlight in someone's character and my altered appreciation of that person, may be compared to Fichte's *Tathandlung*. *Tathandlung*, I said, denotes the performative activity of thought, where the action and the result of the action could not be rigorously separated because the result of the action as much conditioned the action as the action is conditioned by the result. One side always appears with the other. Secondly, *Tathandlung* can never be considered in abstraction from the specific conditions under which it appears, hence it is always real, never abstract. And thirdly, the relation between the activity of the performance and the result of the performance is immediate because it is internal: it exists in and through itself.

Bergsonian duration, as found here, entertains a relation of parts to whole where neither side precedes the other but both are co-determinant. It too does not exist in

8 Deleuze, 1988, 38. Emphasis in original.

abstraction from its conditions. Furthermore, I disagree with Deleuze when he names the virtual "ideal". This is a consequence of the separation of the virtual and the real and of having assumed the virtual somehow to precede the real or exist in some virtual state in real separation from what exists in reality. Rather, it is when we consider the elements in abstraction from their totality and when we want to specify their relation to the whole, that they may be said to be virtual (rather than possible) and not that they are virtual as such (i.e., considered in real abstraction). The nature of duration as "in and for itself" is less clear at this point but will become more apparent in *Matter and Memory*.

3.2 Duration and space as two forms of organisation

The distinction between subjective and objective knowledge entails two forms of organisation, or two ways in which parts relate to wholes. After the passage that we quoted above Bergson drops the terms subjective and objective in favour of a distinction between two types of multiplicities. There are, as he writes, “two kinds of multiplicity, two possible senses of the word 'distinguish', two conceptions, the one qualitative and the other quantitative, of the difference between *same* and *other*” (DI, 81 / 121). We have already seen the essential difference between the two, which concerns the respective processes of organisation, and their "realisation". For the one this consists in a veritable creation, whereas for the other the change from a possible to a real existence only entails a removal of limitations. These two forms of organisation or two kinds of multiplicities he calls duration and space respectively.[9]

9 I prefer the term “organisation” over “multiplicity”. For one, as Jankélévitch notes, the term organisation more effectively overcomes the opposition of same and other (1999, 37). Deleuze rightly praises Bergson for his novel use of the notion multiplicity as *continuum* (Deleuze, 1988, 38) but I find that Deleuze has a tendency to reify the notion of virtual multiplicity, placing too

In *Time and Free Will* duration is seen as the form of organisation proper to conscious states, whereas space is what pertains to external objects. What Bergson discovers is that if I observe my inner states in their natural behaviour I am forced to ascribe to them a certain set of qualities and a form of organisation that is quite unique. My consciousness is indeed a "stream" but this is not a homogeneous stream. Psychic states follow one after the other, without interruption, but within this continuity there are clear differences to be found. The "unrolling" or flow of conscious states is continuous but also heterogeneous. But this heterogeneity does not automatically entail discrete or distinctly different states, rather, the one "permeates" the other; states "interpenetrate", they merge to become new states, or they divide into separate states. Hence these states are "confused", not discrete. When I simply observe myself and try not to bring in any foreign elements I find a continuous or successive stream of heterogeneous elements that are all "here and now". This here-and-now quality means that I cannot compare (hence measure) a previous state with a present one. In the schema that Bergson applies in *Time and Free Will* there is no simultaneity of states but only succession. To account for simultaneity he introduces a second form of organisation called space. Space is a homogeneous grid composed of clearly separated parts all simultaneous and external to each other. These elements can be combined in an infinite number of ways but their combination does not alter the multiplicity.

Spatial elements can be counted because they pre-exist their realisation, in precisely the same way that possibles do. Durational elements cannot be counted, rather, they are "gathered" (59 / 86). Bergson compares it to that of melody (59-60 / 86-7). Take a fairly homogeneous event, writes Bergson, such as a church bell that

great an emphasis on structure. Organisation not only entails a relation of parts to whole (structure), but also a "synthetic", processual, or *durational* aspect.

sounds. We can either count the number of times it sounds or we can listen to it as a melody. To count we need to make the different soundings instances of a single type. This means stripping them of individuating qualities. Keeping score is done via the medium of space. But when we listen to the church bell as though it were a melody we combine the instances as elements of something that grows and progresses. The individuating qualities of the individual instances is what gives the melody rhythm and *timbre*. A slight increase or delay would qualitatively change the melody. The instances merge so that the one is retained when the next appears. Such permeation and internal temporal organisation of listening is quite different from the external and spatial organisation of counting.[10]

4. Time and motion

The organisation of psychic states is durational, whereas the objects of outer sense are organised spatially. Time should not be understood as a linear progression but as duration. Bergson criticises Kant for having modelled inner sense on the idea of linear time (DI 151 / 232). Linear time, or clock-time, it to perceive time on the model of space. It is to assume that time is a homogeneous series of distinct moments, whereas

10 In his wonderful little essay *Listening* Jean-Luc Nancy speaks of the art of listening, or even of listening as a model of truth superior to the visual. Truth conceived as listening would be adequate to a mode of presence "that is not a being (at least not in the intransitive, stable, consistent sense of the word), but rather a *coming* and a *passing*, an *extending* and a *penetrating*... It is a present in waves on a swell, not in a point on a line; it is a time that opens up, that is hollowed out, that is enlarged or ramified, that envelops and separates, that becomes or is turned into a loop, that stretches out or contracts, and so on." What is remarkable is the near-total absence of any engagement with Bergson in Nancy's work, perhaps symptomatic of the forgotten debt to Bergson of so much of contemporary French philosophy. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 13.

With Jankélévitch one cannot but think of medieval polyphonic music, but also of Sati and Ravel, or the contemporary composer Simeon Ten Holt, as being perfect representations of the continuity with distinctness that is duration.

lived time or duration is a heterogeneous and interpenetrating progression. As we have seen in the analysis of number, we need to distinguish between a continuous aspect to account for the infinite divisibility of numbers and a discrete aspect that accounts for the distinctness of numbers. This continuity, claims Bergson in *Time and Free Will,* is dependent on the continuity of thought, whereas distinctness must be accounted for by the schema of space.

Measurable time is only possible on the basis of lived time. That time is measurable is often assumed to be demonstrable through the observation of a regularly occuring event. For instance, if we observe a swinging pendulum then each time it reaches one end a moment of time may be said to have passed. Hence time would be measurable. But as Bergson will demonstrate we would not even be able to interpret the various positions of the pendulum as constituting an object in motion if we did not first experience lived time or duration within us. If time was merely a sequence of discrete moments we would not be able to account for the phenomenon of movement. As Worms notes, this question of the nature of movement and its importance in *Time and Free Will* has so far received little attention in the literature. This is strange because, as Worms stresses, the question of the nature of movement is, or at least for Bergson, "the metaphysical question *par excellence*".[11] Furthermore we know from *Matter and Memory* that Bergson will come to unequivocally affirm the reality of movement. Indeed, reality as such will be claimed to be in perpetual motion.

Yet in *Time and Free Will* Bergson's position seems oddly ambiguous when it comes to phenomenon of movement. Rather than asserting the objective reality of movement he writes: "Motion, in so far as it is a passage from one point to another, is a

11 Worms, 2004, 68-9.

mental synthesis, a psychic and unextended process" (DI 74 / 111). This act we "project into space" (75 / 112). Motion is something subjective for otherwise we would have to assert that "even outside consciousness, the past co-exists along with the present!" (*ibid.*). "Outside ourselves we should find only space, and consequently nothing but simultaneities, of which we cannot even say that they are objectively successive" (77 / 116). In space there is no duration, but only simultaneous states, and their reality "as multiplicity", that is, the various positions of a pendulum understood as a continuous series is "real only for consciousness" (80 / 120). But if motion is only a mental event and not something real this creates a problem in the account of the very experience of motion. As we shall see, in order even to account for the perception of motion we will already need to assume its reality. If this was all there was to it then the account as given in *Time and Free Will* would then supposedly have led Bergson later on to see that his analyses was too limited. This in turn could then have been the reason for extending the application of duration to things outside consciousness and to affirm movement as "absolute", as indeed is the case in *Matter and Memory*.

But is this really so? Worms, for one, seems to be inclined to deny this. The mental act by which movement may be deduced is not simply a mental act, as in a theoretical and subjective condition for its possibility, but, as Worms writes, "an empirical or real act".[12] But then the limitations of this analysis with its strict separation of duration "inside" and space "outside" would have already been recognised in *Time and Free Will*. Bergson's explicit restriction of duration to psychic states and space to the external world must then be understood as part of a strategy. Such an assumption is not unreasonable since this was after all only his doctoral thesis and care thus had be taken

12 Worms, 2004, 92.

not to come across as too revolutionary. And, in fact, I too incline to agree with Worms. Although Bergson never recognised the failure of his account, we may read it as an attempt to push to its very limits the theory that limits time to inner sense and space to outer sense. Even more so, and this Bergson does in some sense affirm, the very idea of separating the content of experience from the act of experience, that is, its form and content, must be given up (see DI 63 / 93 for hints to that effect). And so in *Matter and Memory* Bergson will develop a theory of knowledge that overcomes this duality, and with it the implied representationalism, by reformulating knowledge as *action*. But this would not have been acceptable to his examiners. Therefore Bergson had to restrict duration to the subjective, even though it will make his whole account unstable.

4.1 Inner and outer sense

Bergson introduces duration in order to demonstrate that psychic states cannot straightforwardly be reduced to stimuli because they organise in way that does not allow for enumeration. To account for the idea of psychic states as composing a series of discrete moments, similar to linear time, duration will have to be mixed with space. The schema of space is not really developed by Bergson. He prefers to leave to the side the question of the "absolute reality of space" (62 / 91). Space is referred to as a "faculty" (*faculté,* 65 / 97). It pertains only to external objects, it is a principle of juxtaposition and simultaneity. It is a faculty for making quantitative distinctions and for separating objects from a subtending homogeneous grid (*ibid.*). This then is contrasted with duration, which only pertains to psychic or inner states. Duration is a principle of time and a synthetic principle. The two are summed up in the following

formula: “within the ego [*notre moi* - our I], there is succession without mutual externality; outside the ego, in pure space, mutual externality without succession" (72 / 108). Duration and space thus seem modelled on Kant’s distinction of inner and outer sense, although modified in that time should now be understood as duration.

Bergson restricts duration to inner sense and space to outer sense. Clock time is an abstraction and this he demonstrates through a discussion of the phenomenon of motion. If time were merely a series of moments then we would not be able to even perceive motion. Imagine a swinging pendulum, Bergson writes, "[o]utside of me, in space, there is never more than a single position of the hand and the pendulum, for nothing is left of the past positions" (72 / 108). On the Kantian account there is only externality in outer sense. If time was merely a series of moments then all I would perceive at each individual moment is a corresponding position of the hand of the pendulum. Hence I would not see any motion at all. It is only because "[w]ithin myself there is a process of organization or interpenetration of conscious states going on, which constitutes true duration" that motion first may be perceived (*ibid.*). It is because my psychic states form a continuum that I am able to connect all the single positions into a single movement.

4.2 Motion, a mental synthesis?

The interpenetration of psychic states allows for continuity but, on Bergson's own account, does not allow for any "mutual externality". That I distinguish my conscious states is due to having, as it were, "mixed in" space. Psychic states form a continuity. If I observe a swinging pendulum all I will be able to grasp is an instantaneous *now*.

Outside of me I only find a pendulum in a certain position. Motion then cannot but be a mental synthesis.

> In a word, there are two elements to be distinguished in motion, the space traversed and the act by which we traverse it, the successive positions [of the hand of the pendulum] and the synthesis of these positions. The first of these elements is a homogeneous quality; the second has no reality except in a consciousness (75 / 112)

We thus need to distinguish between the trajectory of the pendulum and the motion itself, the latter being an "*act*" or a mental synthesis and not a quality of the external world, because that would be to assert that "even outside consciousness, the past co-exists along with the present!" It would collapse the very distinction between succession and externality and hence the one between duration and space. Motion is not an objective quality of the external world and the change we perceive outside must therefore be instantaneous. Outside its "endosmosis" with lived duration the perception of the pendulum would presents us with a series of instantly changing positions. These instant changes then need to be combined with the continuous progression of psychic states. But contrary to Bergson's express intentions, the experience of instant change does not yield the desired mutual externality of parts.

Let's look at the example a little bit more closely. Picture the instantaneous positions of the pendulum as white dots on a black surface. "Internally" we are only aware of a continuous *now,* outside of us we perceive a single white dot and not a series of white dots tracing out the trajectory of the pendulum. The separate instances of dots now need to be synthesised to become one continuous movement. The situation would thus be similar to the perception of a string of Christmas lights. These lights, set

to blink in a certain order and at a sufficient speed, produce the sensation of a light-object in motion. This seems to be precisely what Bergson is talking about.[13] If we assume no prior knowledge or experience of movement and each instant appears as an instantaneous flash of light, what would induce us to think that these separate phenomena combine to form one single instance of movement? Rather, what we would experience would be a lighting-up here, then another there and a third one over there; a series of different positions but nothing like the perception of a moving object. Because internally we only experience a "now" and externally there are only the disconnected positions of the pendulum (which we cannot claim to be in motion as this is precisely the thing to be determined) nothing would allow us to order or "synthesise" these position in something like a line, let alone an object in motion. The blinking light (outside any act of synthesis) is merely an unqualified change in my perceptive field. How can I come to assume that this is an object in motion? Nor does it help to assume that a swinging pendulum is an object that changes in distance in respect to the observer. To be aware of a change in distance I need depth-perception. But depth-perception is dependent on real movement in the lenses of the eyes. If the eyes are taken as static objects then depth-perception becomes impossible. Without depth-perception I am only aware of a changing tableau of black and white.

It is because I have a real experience of movement whenever I raise my hand or focus my eyes on some object and because, furthermore, I have learned that when an object approaches me, it tends to get bigger, that I am now able to interpret a growing

13 On further reflection I have come to doubt whether the following is really an argument against Bergson or in fact the use of one of his own arguments against himself. More specificly, whether I am not simply using the critique of the cinematographical method from *Creative Evolution* against the early Bergson of *Time and Free Will*. However, since the discussion is instructive about the limitations of considering movement as only a subjective phenomenon, and Bergson does seem to leave this matter implicit in *Time and Free Will* I have decided to retain it.

blob of colour on a screen to be a train racing right at me. To be able to interpret anything as movement (even on a two-dimensional screen) I already need a prior experience of real movement. Hence only when we assume that our eyes follow the blinking Christmas lights from left to right will we be led to think of this as a movement from left to right. Whenever an object moves there is a corresponding motion in my eyes. It is because I have learned this that even in the absence of a moving object I can still interpret a mere change in colour (e.g., on a projection screen) as being an object in motion. Motion as mental synthesis *is* possible, even in absence of real movement, but only because we are already familiar in a direct and experiential way with the reality of movement.

5. The act of synthesis

Movement cannot be a mental synthesis alone but must preusppose the experience of real movement. Bergson discusses the problematic dual nature of movement as trajectory and as "act" but only effectively deals with this question in *Matter and Memory*.[14] In *Time and Free Will* he distinguishes between the divisibility of the trajectory, something spatial, and the indivisibility of its progression, which is an act of consciousness. The account from *Matter and Memory* is in agreement with this distinction between a divisible trajectory and the indivisibility of its progress. What will change, however, is that, where in *Time and Free Will* this is an act of consciousness, in

14 MM 326-9 / 191-3, taken up again in EC 755-9 / 197-9, under the heading "The Cinematographical Mechanism of Thought". See also Worms 2004, 69.

Matter and Memory Bergson will unequivocally claim the *reality* of movement. Hence duration and consciousness now have a purchase on reality. In *Time and Free Will* Bergson rigorously restricts duration to the mind. Yet even here is an “unexplainable reason” (DI, 148 / 227) why things outside us at seem to be enduring as well.

Whether or not Bergson was aware of the limitations of his account as given here cannot strictly be determined. There are hints that was aware of it and this we will discuss presently. But even if we grant this, it will have to be admitted that Bergson did not yet have all the instruments at his disposal to effectively deal with this issue. Although he might not have wanted to restrict duration to the psychological (strategic reasons aside), the significant progress of the argument that we find with *Matter and Memory* is the concept of memory. What is missing from the account of *Time and Free Will* is a concept or an understanding of something that mediates duration and space. Bergson appeals at various points to their "endosmosis" but because one is merely subjective and the other objective he is unable to effectively demonstrate how this is supposed to work. In *Matter and Memory* the concept of memory will denote the on-going process of integrating and reintegrating the past in the present. It consists of "virtual levels" of contraction and relaxation. This will allow him to demonstrate the continuity of duration and space. As Deleuze points out "the meaning of memory is to give the virtuality of duration itself an objective consistency", this it is able to do because "memory is the coexistence of degrees of difference."[15] Degrees between duration and space, we might add. Whether he was aware of this or not I would agree

15 Deleuze in "Bergson's Conception of Difference" in *The New Bergson*, Mullarkey (ed.), 1999, 55

with Worms that the problem that will come to occupy him with *Matter and Memory* is already fully posed in *Time and Free Will.*[16]

What Bergson does notice in *Time and Free Will*, regardless of the question of the status of movement and duration, is that from a purely "spatial" point of view, movement leads to the insoluble paradoxes of Zeno and that the only way to deal with this effectively is to attribute movement with an "indivisible" quality. *If* space is only mutual externality, *then* a mental synthesis needs to be added. As Worms notes:

> What Bergson, like Kant, wants to stress by this, is, properly understood, the following point: namely that *the principle of this act cannot be found in the elements that serve it as its contents* or its matter, but [that it] presupposes a source or resource [that is] different in nature, something like a *subject.*[17]

We may thus read *Time and Free Will* as an attempt to push a certain line of thought to its limits. Bergson discovers what Kant and Fichte discovered before him, namely that, as Kant writes, "among all representations *combination* is the only one that is not given through objects, but can be executed only by the subject itself, since it is an act of its self-activity" (KrV B 130). The question is what to make of such a subject, understood as an "act of self-activity". If, as we will come to see, all of existence must be thought of as spontaneously organised, then this subject clearly cannot be some "fixed" *(figée)* or "persistent" (*beharlliches*) self. The continuity does not lie in an underlying substance (*subiectum* or *hypokeimenon*) but in the continuity of the *act.* For all his critique of Kant, Bergson thus clearly continues the line of thought opened by Kant.

16 Worms, 2004, 69.
17 *Op. cit.,* 71.

5.1 The living compass of animals

There are a number of hints that point towards the analyses of *Matter and Memory.* One thing we might have already noticed is that "abstract" time might not be that abstract. If pure duration would be left to itself it would be in danger of collapsing into a continuous "now". Duration actually *needs* space if it wants the present to contain more than the instantaneous present. Already in *Time and Free Will* the link between space and the practical is established. It is space that "enables us to use clean-cut distinctions, to count, to abstract, and perhaps to speak" (DI, 66 / 97). This practical quality of space is an important theme for Bergson. In *Matter and Memory* space is the schema of our possible action on things and it is intimately related to the future. In *Creative Evolution* space will be linked to the very materiality and individuality of living-beings. It then becomes less of a surprise to see Bergson writing about the "living compass" of animals and the "remarkable fact, the surprising ease with which many vertebrates, and even some insects, manage to find their way through space", something that amounts to saying that "space is not so homogeneous for the animal as for us" (DI, 65 / 96). Indeed, how else to explain the natural distinction between left and right if not that each has a different *quality* (66 / 97)? Perhaps the schema of space as some underlying homogeneous grid is something specific to the *human* faculty (see *loc. cit*)?

6. Free will and determinism

For reasons fairly analogous to those of Kant, Bergson has been led to assume a synthetic act that integrates heterogeneous elements in to a continuity understood as

duration. The distinction between duration and space has allowed him to criticise the idea of the intensive magnitude of psychic states. He may now claim a domain where things cannot be quantified without seriously distorting their nature. Although for now he restrains this understanding to the subjective, it is clear that it must pertain to reality itself. For Bergson defenders of free will and determinists alike have overlooked this. The determinists think that because a stimulus can be measured, its effect on the mind must likewise allow for measurement. But between stimuli reduced to quantity and the qualitative nature of the synthesis of the mind we have to do with two radically different types of organisation.

As for the believers in a free will, they equally make the mistake of representing conscious states on a spatial model. It is the idea of an uninfluenced choice that Bergson objects to most. The idea of free will assumes that I am free to choose (without outside influence) between available alternatives and furthermore that I have relevant knowledge of these alternatives (otherwise it would be mere caprice). But for Bergson both the idea of choice and the idea of pre-existing alternatives make no sense. Choice seems to entail that I can step back, press "pause" and choose. But the essence of time-as-duration is its continuous integration or synthesis of all my experience. Psychic states cannot be paused, hence where or when would the choice be taking place? Secondly, the idea that I can look into the future, the idea that my choice is informed by that which I am about to choose, is equally mistaken. For Bergson the future crucially is not yet here. The idea of the future is that of the possible, as we have seen above (see Sect. 3). But the future is only the *progressive* and open-ended aspect of the on-going synthesis of duration. Choice is informed by the past, not the future. Although we are

naturally inclined to assume that the future will resemble the past, such a pragmatic assumption should not be confused with a proper understanding of time itself.

6.1 Freedom as expression of the entire soul

What of this more positive notion of freedom of which Bergson spoke in the Introduction to *Time and Free Will*? Bergson's account is much richer than I will be able to do justice to in the space allowed. As we know, for Bergson, our conscious states cannot really be considered as separate states at all. Rather, there is a continuous synthesis, or a continuous work that integrates the various aspects of my life. But such integration admits of degrees (109 / 166). In fact, the deeper we descend into our deep or fundamental self the more these states permeate each other, the more we ascend to the surface the more we see states alongside states. For Bergson there is a difference between the deep self, which tends towards integration, and the superficial self, which tends towards disintegration. These disintegrated states can be understood as so many habits, as so many fixed loops of action that we perform almost without being aware of them.[18] And there is nothing principally wrong with this, it is an economical way to deal with limited resources. Bergson goes so far as to liken them to our organic functions, already foreshadowing his analysis from *Creative Evolution* (111 / 168). But such almost automatic actions have little to do with freedom. Freedom, for Bergson, only applies to those actions that well up from the deepest, best integrated, parts of the self, because "it is the whole soul, in fact, which gives rise to the free decision; and the act will be so much the freer the more the dynamic series with which it is connected tends to be the fundamental self" (110 / 167). But of course, if such an act expresses

18 See the notion of "reflex actions" on 112 / 170.

the entirety of the soul, then this can no longer be a merely disinterested choice between alternative futures. Here it is the soul in its entirety that speaks; it not a question of choice but of *expression*, of becoming one with oneself. Indeed, using a phrase close to the heart of Fichte, Bergson writes that it is a question of self-determination (109 / 165). Such actions that express the soul are rare and only issue forth from a "great and solemn crisis" (*ibid.*) when the soul "revolts" and the deep self, "suddenly giving way to an irresistible thrust (...), burst the outer crust" (112 / 169).

If such an action can only come from the deep self, in an act that is truly spontaneous, then should we this call this a *free* act? True, the whole sense of freedom has changed. As Bergson stresses at the very last page of the book, we must first of all see that "the very idea of necessary determination here loses every shred of meaning" (156 / 239). This is because time-as-duration is a continuous integrative effort that takes up the whole, hence each moment is properly unique and can never again be repeated. Necessary determination would mean that everything is already given in the past. But, as Bergson continues, "there cannot be any question either of foreseeing the act *before* it is performed or of reasoning about the possibility of the contrary action once the deed is *done*" *(ibid.,* emp. added). Before the act is performed it cannot strictly speaking be foreseen as the act takes up all that has gone before, making pure repetition impossible *de jure*. There is no discontinuity here that would allow us to stop time, foresee the future action without this action being parly determined by what takes place between the present moment and its execution. And although our actions are free in that no law governs them, the alternative to the present action is only ever a hypothetical alternative, something that should not be confused with real action. We

imagine how our life would have been if we had done B and not A, but we only ever know our life the way that it actually turns out. The moment of choice is more like a threshold within a continuous development, than a junction of alternatives. As a result of the non-deterministic, qualitative and non-abstract nature of time, freedom, with Bergson, becomes a shade or a degree (109, 120 / 166, 182-3). Freedom is no longer the absence of influences (this would be a mere abstraction), but it lies in the effort to express from the very depths of my being.

V. RHYTHMS OF DURATION

1. From *Time and Free Will* to *Matter and Memory*

In *Time and Free Will* Bergson distinguished between two forms of organisation, duration and space. Because the two are incommensurable, or stand to be seriously misrepresented when we attempt to represent what is proper to time in what is proper to space, Bergson was able to claim the irreducibly non-deterministic nature of psychic states. Although it is not claimed that conscious states are independent of any influence as such, between the measurable or quantifiable nature of the stimulus and its qualitative effect on the mind, this influence is not something that itself can be quantitatively determined. This is because the kind of organisation proper to conscious states consists of a constant integrative effort where all aspects of psychic life and their "synthesis" stand in a relation of mutual determination. We may say that because my current state is determined by all of my past life and because my relation with my past (the elements of the past I actualise) depends on the present situation, each moment is unique *by right*. Each moment is unique in that it can never be repeated. Hence the

precise effect of a stimulus can never be determined. Because its effect on me can never be repeated it cannot be measured.

How exactly this was supposed to work had yet to become clear to Bergson. With hindsight we may see more clearly what he tried to express and the difficulties he encountered. In *Time and Free Will* Bergson distinguishes between duration and space but he is oddly ambiguous about it. On the one hand the two will need to be kept radically separate (as different in nature), because only in this way does he think he can maintain the irreducibility of consciousness. But now that they are separate how then to understand their "endosmosis" in the experience of movement? With the two rigorously separated and with duration restricted to the subjective it seems his best option is to claim movement as mental synthesis. We need to distinguish between the distance traversed in space, which is external and quantifiable, and the mental synthesis that is only subjective, which unites it in one continuous movement. But as we have seen the attempts to deduce the continuity of movement from a mental act could not have satisfied Bergson. In order to interpret any purely external and spatial phenomenon as an object in motion we already need assume a prior experience with real motion. Motion as both a phenomenon of the external world and yet something that is continuous will be an important issue in his next work.

As we have indicated, the rather strict opposition of duration and space finds a more subtle form in his discussion of the free self. On the one hand there is the superficial self where we find various reflex actions or habits, actions that come fairly close to being predictable. These actions are useful and economical but they are not properly integrated in the deep life of the soul. Already in *Time and Free Will* Bergson

hints that the tendency towards externalisation that we find in the life of the self must be linked to the practical nature of space, to our faculty for social interaction and to language. This is opposed by a real effort of integration of the deep self. Here the entirety of the self aims at expression. Where the deep self tends towards freedom, the superficial self tends towards necessity and practical utility.

The problems of the nature of movement, the possible application of duration outside of the subjective, and the relation between duration and space will all be solved by removing any ambiguity as to the status of duration and movement. In *Matter and Memory* duration and movement are real and all reality is durational or in motion.

1.1 The reality of duration, a *Fichtean* problem

What, in a more strict sense, is the problem *Matter and Memory* has to address? In *Time and Free Will* Bergson understood that our experience of motion requires mental synthesis. If time is seen as linear and discrete and the mind as being merely impressed by a succession of separate stimuli then we would never be able to experience motion. Hence the stimuli need to be grasped in a multiplicity and such a multiplicity must be understood as intensive, rather than extensive, or as durational, rather than spatial. But if the problem is one of unity and continuity, then, as Worms points out, Bergson will want "neither a purely functional diversity without unity, nor a synthetic unity produced by an act exterior to the sense data".[1] We see that this in fact is similar to the problem Fichte found in Kant. Whether we try to account for the unity of experience or for the unity of movement, in both cases a purely functional diversity without unity is to be rejected and an appeal is made to an act of synthesis. But this unity should not be

1 Worms, 2004, 151.

seen as produced by some act purely exterior to the elements. If the act of synthesis remains external to elements existing in full independence from this act, then we cannot see how this act would be able to relate the elements. Conversely we might want to say that the act precedes the elements but then we should avoid the elements from becoming mere manifestations of some *sui generis* act of synthesis. The distinction between the act of synthesis and the elements to be united must be maintained, yet without both sides remaining unrelated.

Bergson will need to show much more clearly how duration and space work together. It will be the concept of memory that will allow him to demonstrate degrees of difference between duration and space. Bergsonian memory should be read as a development of Kantian and Fichtean concepts of imagination, as that which mediates content and form. In this chapter we will look closely at how memory functions. Although memory will be introduced precisely to *mediate* duration and space, memory must also be understood to *be* duration. This might seem like a circular argument but it is a result of the fundamental shift in Bergson's thought that takes place from *Time and Free Will* to *Matter and Memory*. Bergson has come to fully accept the reality of duration. Hence it is no longer merely one of two fundamental schemata, but it alone is the prime category. As we will come to see in this chapter, Bergson will now attempt to demonstrate how, from this new ground, we may account for space. The solution that he finds in *Matter and Memory* is to demonstrate that reality *qua* duration *tends* in two directions. One direction is towards space, the other is towards pure duration. Duration thus appears, so to speak, twice. Within this account the new concept of memory plays a fundamental role. "Memory" will come to denote a specific form of organisation. It

will be memory that mediates the different degrees that exist between the two tendencies of duration and space. Memory, in its various levels of "contraction" towards duration and "relaxation" towards space, explains and mediates the two tendencies of duration and space. If memory is the form of organisation that allows for different degrees or different "rhythms" of duration-space to exist within itself, in what Bergson repeatedly calls a "virtual" state, then memory too must ultimately be seen to be duration. For it was always duration that was the principle of qualitative interpenetration, hence memory too is on par with duration. As our reading progresses in the chapter this complex internal dynamics of memory and duration-space will become clearer.

1.2 The relation of body and soul and the *union* of body and soul

Bergson's explicit purpose with *Matter and Memory* is to determine the function of the body in the life of the soul (MM 317 / 180, see also 161 / 9). This role of the body will be shown to consist of a limitation of the soul (316 / 179). From the totality of influences that reach us, we select those that are of interest to us. It is the body that is this mechanism of selection. This selection, in turn, will allow Bergson to account for experience in a way that overcomes the distinction of form and content. Perception is not of a different nature than matter yet neither should matter be equated with the perception we hav of it. Indeed, the traditional opposition of representation and object is rejected in favour of different activities. The world is one of activities, and perception, qua activity is part and parcel of this world. Instead of representation

Bergson initially proposes with something he tentatively calls an image, something he claims lies halfway a representation and a thing (*ibid.*)

But in the course of clarifying the relation of body and soul a problem is raised that Bergson writes "we cannot bring ourselves to leave in suspense"; this is the problem of the *union* of soul and body (317 / 180). In the fourth and last chapter of the book, and in the somewhat misleadingly named "Summary and Conclusion" (misleading because it introduces key new arguments and insights, *especially* towards the very end of the book), Bergson then turns to discuss this unity. This problem of their unity is nothing less than "the metaphysical problem of freedom" (317, see also 368, 373 / 180, 238, 244). Right up to the very last pages the book Bergson builds up to a crescendo that attempts to overcome what he calls the triple opposition of the unextended and the extended, of quality and quantity, and finally, of freedom and necessity (373 / 244). This may be called a metaphysical problem in order to distinguish it from the ethical problem of freedom. As Worms notes: "Bergsonian freedom is attributed to a metaphysical reality as such, before taking on a moral or psychological significance. This freedom, furthermore, is not to be constructed in *a priori* fashion by the philosopher, but is to be observed at work in experience of history itself."[2] This metaphysical problem is one of how to show that freedom is not an *emperium in empirio,* but that all of existence is free by right. To stress the difference with that other notion of metaphysical freedom, it is exactly an attempt to make freedom intelligible as operative *within* the material world. Kant separated his understanding of the world as bound by universal and fixed laws, a world governed by

2 Frédéric Worms, *Introduction à Matière et Mémoire de Bergson* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), 207. Fichte also stressed that the philosopher is there to observe, rather than construct, e.g.: "one is supposed to act internally and observe what one is doing, ..., one has to ask the other person to perform the action in question", WLnm 28 / 110.

determinism, from his belief in the freedom of the soul. His metaphysical solution was to posit freedom within the realm of the intelligible or the "super-sensible", with determinism operative in the material world. Bergson, by contrast, wants to show that precisely because freedom is not some absolute state free from all material necessity, just as necessity or determination can never be total, we may now consider *degrees* of freedom between the intelligible and the material (see DI, 109, 120 / 166, 182-3). Because pure repetition is rooted out, all of existence can be shown to be free. It is duration in its various degrees that will allow us to understand the triple opposition, the union of body and soul and finally the reality of freedom.

The metaphysical problem of freedom may be seen to relate to an ethical theory of freedom as follows. An ethical theory of freedom already assumes a certain intimation of freedom. The ethical problem concerns how to become aware of freedom, how to live in accordance with freedom, how to organise society in such a way as to maximise freedom, etc. Although any metaphysical approach of the issue of freedom, be it as duration or as spontaneous act of synthesis, will always assume a certain ethical understanding of freedom, the relevance of the attempt does not lie there. Indeed, for both Fichte and Bergson freedom already *is* reality, but clearly this does not for them, or for us, solve the ethical problem *ab ovo*. The approach in this thesis is that, rather than departing from a certain notion of what it means to live and act in freedom, it first asks how freedom might be conceived as possible at all. That means, possible in light of all the other conviction we hold about the world. In this thesis we thus situate the question of freedom in a debate with determinism, and it asks how we can come to an understanding that neither sacrifices our conviction in the reality of freedom

(whichever way construed), nor the insight offered by deterministic theories of the world. To once again stress what we may hope the outcome of such an approach to freedom might bring, we hope that once we come to an understanding of what freedom might be, that then the ethical theory of freedom (in terms of how to life and act) as a result will be all the more realistic.

Between the first problem of the *relation* of body and soul and the second, *metaphysical* problem of the *union* of body and soul, a rather remarkable change in perspective takes place. As Worms already noted, freedom should not be left to philosophical *a priori* deductions, as there is a real experience of freedom that is available to us. Between the first practical problem of the relation of body and soul and the second metaphysical problem of unity we will witness a rather drastic shift from the erstwhile relative or practical form of knowledge, one that leads one to see an opposition of matter and spirit, to an absolute form of knowledge that is concerned with reality itself.[3] Bergson now asks of us to "return to the immediate" (MM, 323 / 187). The hindsight, so useful to in our reading of *Time and Free Will,* will be of use again in *Matter and Memory.* Already in his essay on the immediate data of consciousness Bergson distinguished between two forms of organisation, which were also called two forms of knowledge. There is subjective knowledge, which is a complete and adequate kind of knowledge, and objective knowledge, which is an approximative kind of knowledge. This double duality of two kinds of organisation that are also two kinds of knowledge Bergson left undeveloped in this work. Although this will only be made explicit in the works written subsequently to *Matter and Memory*, it is already operative in this work. It will allow us to understand the body as both something

3 See also Worms, 1997, 200-201.

separate from the soul, and as in *union* with the soul. The two forms of knowledge are qualified as relative versus absolute, practical versus disinterested, after the fact and contemporaneous with it, or in sympathy, and finally as intellect and intuition. In *Creative Evolution* both forms of knowledge will be said to "touch the absolute". Each will be shown to have its proper domain. On the one hand there is the quantitative, the spatial and the discrete, on the other, the qualitative, the intensive and the creative. We see then that the distinction does not function as a transcendental distinction between conditioned knowledge and knowledge of conditions (the empirical and the transcendental). However, one form of knowledge is said to be adequate to science and the *ready-made,* and the other is the domain of philosophy and knowledge of *that which makes itself*. It appears then that Kant's transcendental distinction is now also applied ontologically. But that it does not function as an ontological distinction alone may already be seen to follow from the fact that Bergson also explicitly retains the two as forms of *knowledge*. To appreciate what Bergson does and does not appropriate from the Kantian philosophy we must give due attention to the quite drastic change that took place between Kant and Bergson. This we will discuss in the Conclusion, and as we shall demonstrate there, it is the mediating figure of Fichte that will allow us to understand more clearly Bergson’s appropriation and misappropriation of Kant.

Our interest in *Matter and Memory* lies mainly in how Bergson understands the relations between duration and space. To bring this out clearly we will have to abstract from much of the argument as presented in the book. *Matter and Memory* is arguably Bergson’s most complex and difficult book. Luckily there already exists both an excellent close-reading of this text and other readings that situates it carefully within

Bergson's overall development.[4] We will not have to repeat these efforts. Our focus will be on the metaphysical problem of freedom. What distinguished this reading from other reading of Bergson is that is does not merely describe or explain the two major schemas of duration and space but its attempt to account for the necessary inner relation *between* the two. As we are beginning to see this relation develops from its first appearance in *Time and Free Will* right down to *Creative Evolution.* Worms comes closest to it in his *Bergson ou les deux sens de la vie*. But this reading does not make clear *why* duration and space develop in the way that they do. It is this that sets the present reading apart from the others. In order to make this development explicit I have had to abstract quite drastically from much of the explicit content of each of the works discussed.[5] As a result Bergson's unique mix of empirical and philosophical arguments is lost. Yet by liberating the argument of the empirical we see more clearly Bergson's account of a unitary, continuous and concrete experience that cannot but take place under the form of an essential opposition of the creative and the repetitive, the active and the passive.

2. Pure perception and pure memory

Bergson's second work is sub-titled "An Essay on the Relation of the Body and the Spirit". This relation will be shown to be one of limitation. The body is a mechanism of limitation "with a view towards action". After an elaborate argument Bergson will come

4 See Worms 1997 for MM; Worms 2004 and Jankélévitch 1999 for his entire work; a good introduction to DI and MM is given in Guerlac 2006.

5 For discussion of Bergon's relevance to contemporary neuro-science see the collection *Bergson Et Les Neurosciences: Actes Du Colloque International de Neuro-Philosophie* (Le Plessis-Robinsion: Institut Synthélabo pour le progres de la connaissance, 1997) P. Gallois and G. Forzy (ed.).

to conclude that my body, this present and my action are all fundamentally the same (see 279-81 / 137-9). Having thus redefined the material as a "quasi-instantaneous section ... in the flowing mass" that is duration, he will then be in a position to show the unity of body and soul as lying *within* duration (281 / 139). How did Bergson come to such an extraordinary conclusion?

2.1 Idealism and realism

One of the things Bergson objects to is the distinction between the content and form of experience, something he blames Kant for having installed within philosophy. As he will come to discuss explicitly in Chapter III, this can only lead to the relativity of knowledge. Bergson wants neither a purely speculative *copy* of reality as found in the idea of representation, nor should we equate our knowledge with the *whole* of reality; rather, it should be seen as a *part* of it. Hence he calls that what we find in experience an "image", something midway between a representation and a thing. It is with this idea of image that he feels he can show the inadequacy of idealism and realism. Idealism starts from the world as it is given to me in experience. It is this givenness that accounts for the certainty of the idealist's claims. It then attempts to deduce the objectivity of the world from the structure of consciousness. The problem is that because the idealist denies the objectivity of the world the harmony of the structure of the world as found in experience and that of the mind can only be deduced from consciousness. But then the success of science becomes incomprehensible (179 / 28).

Although idealism is the only point of view that is actually *given* to us, we *believe* in the realist's point of view (178 / 27). Realism starts from the objectivity of the world

and tries to ascertain the certainty of knowledge through a corresponding series of perceptions. But if realism starts from self-given "images" that combine themselves, it is perception that becomes the accident (*ibid.*). Where idealism claims a "centred" universe and a privileged subject, realism claims an "a-centred" universe without a subject (177 / 26). The two systems are thus irreducible to one another (179 / 28). As we have seen, Fichte came to a quite similar conclusion.

2.2 Perception is a form of action

But is there not a postulate common to both? Indeed, says Bergson, there is. Both assume that "perception has a wholly speculative interest; [that] it is pure knowledge" (*ibid.*). Both assume that perception is a kind of knowledge, a knowledge that is modelled on that of science. They do not see that such knowledge is already a very specific form of our interaction with the world. Both theories assume that perception can be explained on the basis of what in fact is a special case of knowledge. That is, both uncritically assume that we can model the conditions of experience on what is a *conditioned form* of knowledge. Rather than assuming representationalism as a model, can we not assume that perception or experience is a form of *action*? This is a key insight shared by both Fichte and Bergson. We need to start thinking of our relation to the world as a kind of interaction, and not as some disinterested reproduction. If we assume that scientific knowledge is a very specialised form of action then we will be able to see how human knowledge and experience is rooted in something shared by all life: "[L]iving matter, even as a simple mass of protoplasm, is already irritable and

contractile, ... it is open to the influence of external stimulation, and answers to it by mechanical, physical and chemical reactions" (*ibid.*).

Between centred and a-centred worlds we must assume centres, not centres of representation, but centres of *action* (182 / 31). These centres of action move within what we can only call an a-centred totality. This totality must be understood as a system of duration where all actions reverberate throughout the entire system. It is a whole where everything acts on everything else (167 / 17). A centre of action selects from the influences that reaches it those that are of interest to it and to these it reacts. The others are simply allowed to pass through. What it reacts to equals what it is perceptive of. Perception is a selection from a totality. Hence perception is both about the world and truly part of the world. Such perception is a form of direct contact and this Bergson calls "pure perception" (185 / 34).

Both kinds of influences are real; the difference lies in how the organism responds. An action that is selected is retained or perceived, this means it is not responded to immediately. There is an interval between excitation and response, and this is what makes perception a "virtual action". Perception is not some superfluous copy whose usefulness we could never understand; rather perception is the whole sequence of received excitation, interval and executed response. To this virtual action Bergson opposes "real action" (205 / 57). This distinction is, in fact, misleading. It could lead one to think that virtual action is somehow not real. Better would have been to call it "immediate action". Most stimuli are responded to immediately, or as he says, "locally" (see 204 / 56: "pain is a *local* effort"). Although this is not made explicit in *Matter and Memory* we may understand such action-reaction cycli as so many habits set

up by the organism. A habit is relatively closed cycle of actions and reactions. In contrast are more open and adaptive chains of actions-reactions. A relatively closed cycle occurs “locally” in that it need not be derouted via a centre. Since for Bergson everything acts and reacts to everything the action that we do not perceive must be as real as the ones that we do perceive. Unperceived, or unconscious action is delt with locally or automatically. The “virtual” action of perception is just as real, but it is a part of a larger cycle; it is, as Bergson writes, “on the way to action”. Because the appropriate response first needs to be executed it is not yet (the whole of) an action, hence virtual. But this does not make it any more or any less real that the action-reaction cycli that the organism deals with locally.

2.3 The continuation of the past in the present

Perception as a form of action is called "pure" by Bergson in the sense that it abstracts from certain conceptual "impurities". "Impurities" appear when things that differ in kind are mixed together. This is something that is very specific to Bergson's method. For Bergson, concrete phenomena are generally a mixture of different ideal types or "tendencies". For instance, between the profound self and the superficial self lies a difference of freedom and necessity. But there is no absolute freedom, just as there is no absolute necessity. The self, therefore, is a mixture of both freedom and necessity. This is also the case with perception. Pure perception, *as action alone,* tends towards a form of immediacy. But perception as we experience it is not this pure form. Perception as action-reaction involves an interval and a selection. This makes it neither

instantaneous, nor unmediated. These elements will thus have to be found elsewhere. The theory of pure perception must be complemented with a theory of "pure memory". It is when pure memory and pure perception are mixed that concrete perception (or the “image”) appears. Pure memory, understood as the preservation of the past in the present, will allow for an interval between action and reaction. It is the intersection of memory and perception that allows for selection to take place.

The discussion of the theory of pure memory starts by distinguishing between two forms in which the past is said to survive: as motor mechanisms and as individual recollections (224 / 78). Motor mechanism is what is found in rote-learning. We repeat something endlessly and finally we end up being able to repeat it almost automatically. This Bergson calls habit interpreted by memory (229 / 84). It is a mixture of habits (semi-closed circuits of action-reaction) and memory. The second form in which the past is retained in the present is as individual recollections. Bergson calls such recollections "memory-images". Whilst "habit-memory", although not being true or pure memory, has a clear and obvious use, the recollection of memory-images seem to serve no purpose at all. Such capriciously reappearing memory-images might be without any real use, but it does, however, indicate that somehow or other our past life is preserved and may be called back to the present.

Bergson then sets off on a long analysis of various forms of aphasia, apraxia and amnesia to determine how the past is preserved. The conclusion he arrives at is that the past is not stored in the brain at all; if anything, the brain is, as it were, stored in it (see 292 / 151). Although he does not appear to be saying it with so many words, the concept of "pure memory" that he arrives at is in fact that of duration. Duration we said

was the interpenetration and constant re-organisation of all of my past life. The present thus takes up the past. This means that time preserves itself. The past is preserved in the present and the present is simply the extreme limit of what is an on-going process or movement. If time must be understood to preserve itself then the past cannot be thought of as somehow stored in the brain. Rather, although we have yet to make this clear, the body, which in its very corporeality or materiality includes the brain, must be seen as temporally organised. If we assume matter without duration then we cannot account for its persistance through time. Therefore, if matter is temporally organised, the past cannot be thought of as again stored in the material brain. As Bergson states boldly at the end of Chapter I:

> Questions relating to subject and object, to their distinction and their union, should be put in terms of time rather than space (218 / 71).

This time is nothing other than duration.

Reality is a process called duration. It is temporally organised, everything that is said to exists consists of a continuous effort of integration and reintegration. Every organism constantly integrates new experiences and reintegrates these new experiences with all of its past experiences. For Bergson we are all in time, and time is not in us. But in *Matter and Memory* Bergson is not always as explicit about the metaphysical underpinnings of the argument. This in part is due to his preference for a concrete and empirical kind of philosophy. As a result it is easy to misinterpret what must be his most well-known illustration, that of the cone of memory. Picture memory as a cone, where the tip of the cone is the point where all of our past experiences are “inserted” into the

present moment. The tip of the cone is the moment of action. As the cone widens out past experience is progressively “relaxed” and this is where individual recollections are found. But the image of a cone could easily be read as some kind of spatial rendition of memory. This is misleading. Rather, the cone is chosen because it elegantly combines two opposing movements in one image: that of contraction and that of relaxation. When we learn something this does not consist in retaining each instance in its perfect individuality, rather, they are combined in a qualitative way and when we say that we have experience in something we know how to apply different yet related cases to the one at hand. This is what Bergson means when he writes that memory contracts past experience to insert it into the present. But at the same time the individual instances are retained. Hence memory widens out or progressively relaxes. Memory is thus tencs is two directions, towards contraction and towards recollection.

Memory is not so much a container of past events but a form of organisation that allows for qualitative fusion of events on the one hand, and a retention of past events in a discrete fashion on the other hand. These two movements are graphically represented by the cone. Memory is a progressive and qualitative synthesis that at the same time consists of an infinite or virtual number of degrees between contraction and relaxation. To understand how these degrees are “actualised” the theory of pure memory must now be recombined with that of pure perception. Memory allows us to approach experience with all the knowledge of the past, but at the same time it is perception that call forth specific past experiences.

2.4 Productive and reproductive imagination

The distinction between memory contraction and memory recollection seems to reworks Kant's distinction of productive and reproductive imagination.[6] For Kant, and as we shall see presently for Bergson, too, imagination (*Einbildung*) is key in explaining recognition (see KrV A 115ff). Recognition involves a "calling back of a perception", this perception may then be recognised as being the same as the present perception. This calling back depends on reproductive imagination (KrV A 121). But reproductive imagination could only take place if there were already an image to work with. Reproductive imagination is empirical and subjective; it is dependent on productive imagination, which alone takes place *a priori* (KrV A 121, 118). The productive synthesis of the imagination is related to the transcendental unity of apperception; it is an *a priori* condition for the possibility of all composition of the manifold in imagination (KrV A 118). For Kant, too, reproduction is the special case and production is an on-going synthesis that is a necessary condition for experience as such.

Bergson greatly improves the account of how a mere calling back helps us understand recognition. Kant adhered to an associatianist theory of recognition (KrV A 121). He sees that this does not help matters much as it would still remain entirely contingent and under-determined how one thing is to be associated with another thing (KrV A 121-2). He appeals to "affinity" as an objective ground for all association. But such affinity cannot be found in the representations themselves, which finally leads him to assume that they must somehow be grounded in the unity of apperception. This, he says, is "certainly strange" but as he considers unity of experience in abstraction from the content of experience, that is, as a principle of unity that is separate from the

6 N.b. Bergson does not discuss Kant's distinction of productive and reproductive imagination.

elements it unites, there is not really any other option open to him. Ultimately this must be seen as due to his investment in representationalism.

Bergson does not start with representations, but with action. From the point of view of action he then tries to give an account of how images appear. But as we are beginning to see, these images are always already the result of the confluence of both past experience and present perception-as-selection. This past experience, understood as duration, is not a repository of fixed and discrete representations from which we choose the appropriate one, but a work of constant integration. The past, integrated and preserved in the present, is directed at the present perception. It is no longer a question of recognising a shared quality between past and present perceptions. This, indeed, is near impossible to demonstrate, even if only for the fact that practically everything shares something with everything else and nothing shares everything with anything else. The question rather, is one of selection, understood as a form of actualisation.

3. Recognition

The problem with associationism is that it tries to explain the act of association by starting from what is better understood as the outcome of this act. It substitutes two discrete and discontinuous series of representations (a series of remembered representations and a series of present ones) for what is a continuous and progressive movement or development (MM 269 / 125). Kant rightly understood that an image must first be formed through an act of synthesis, but, Kant failed to apply this same

insight to reproductive memory. Only the intersection of memory and perception allows us to determine our perception. Perception does not come to us ready-made but involves a synthetic effort. Memory too needs to be actualised. Rather than first perceiving an object and then attempting to determine it by past perceptions, recognition (which is more properly understood as a determination) is the result of memory being contemporaneous with perception.[7] To assume the perception of an object *qua object* is to beg the question of how this is possible.

Accoring to Bergson we do not simply perceive a world full of ready-made objects, rather, such objects are the result of a selection from a totality. This is done on the basis of our needs and interest. Hence, we see that which is relevant to us. This is not a random and mechanical process but is based on our past experiences. Memory thus enters immediately into it. Our concrete experience of the world is an interaction of memory and perception and it is this that allow us to account for recognition. Our perception is a determination, this determination is immediate in the sense that it does not first wait for the object to be constituted, rather it pertains to the constitution of an object *qua object*. Memory and perception are not two discrete series of ready-made representations that resemble each other, as if "resemblance" would clarify anything. Rather, memory and perception intersect and this leads to a process of condensation or crystallisation. As he writes in the case of listening, or rather, hearing and understanding someone speak:

> We have here a continuous movement, by which the nebulosity of the idea is condensed into distinct auditory images, which, still fluid, will be finally solidified as they coalesce with the sounds materially perceived. At no moment is

7 See Bergson's discussion of the circuit of recognition, 249-51 / 104-6.

> it possible to say with precision where the idea and where the memory-image begins, or where the memory-image and where the sensation begins (266 / 122, transl. mod.).

What we perceive is thus half memory, half perception, hence Bergson calls it a memory-image.[8]

3.1 My body, this present, this action

Pure memory, pure perception and the memory-image constitute a single and continuous movement that is our experience (276 / 133). Bergson distinguished "pure" memory and "pure" perception from what we normally consider as memory and perception. What we tend to think of as memory and perception are mixed phenomena. For Bergson there is really only the actually existing present moment, where all of our past life (pure memory) and the instantaneous actions of the entire universe (pure perception) coalesce. The present moment is this totality of action, but these actions are all durational, that is, they continue the past in the present.

This intersection, Bergson says, is precisely the consciousness I have of my *body* (281 / 138). For Bergson movement and action are the true categories. Where the past concerns those actions that are essentially "powerless",

> My present is that which interests me, which lives for me, and in a word, that which summons me to action (280 / 137).

8 For more on Bergson's critique also compare the important analysis of the "general idea", 295ff / 155ff.

Although the present is no longer that mathematical point between past and future, Bergson does speak of it as a "quasi-instantaneous section". But this is because the present has now been redefined in terms of action. If the present is "now" and if this concerns all that interests me, then the present too is a selection.

> [T]he present moment is constituted by the quasi-instantaneous section effected by our perception in the flowing mass, and this section is precisely that which we call the material world (281 / 139).

The present is "effected" by perception, perception being precisely the activity of selection. This section is what we call the material world, claims Bergson. If time itself has become in some sense substantive and real, and the material "a system of sensations and movements and nothing else" (281 / 138), then that which we tend to think of as enduring, as material, can only be quasi-permanent. This quasi-permanent, or quasi-unchanging nature of the material world is the effect of my perception and interests.

4. The turn in experience

The role of the body in the life of the spirit is to limit the spirit with a view towards action (316 / 179). The spirit, being essentially of the temporal order, is the totality of my past actions. The body is perception, is action, and this action gives focus to the totality of my past. The memory condenses all its past experience into one brilliant point and it is the intersection of this point on the plane of action that makes up my present moment. This Bergson represents as the cone of memory intersecting with the

plane of action (293 / 152). The plane as the totality of actions and reactions is both the "now" and the material world. *My* present, however, the present I experience, is a selection from this totality. The selection is determined by how my past life is inserted into this wide and open present.

Having achieved what he set out demonstrate, Bergson writes that we could stop here, but that "by the way" a metaphysical problem was raised that "we cannot bring ourselves to leave in suspense" (317 / 180). This is the problem of the *union* of body and soul. The preceding analysis has "pushed to an extreme" a dualism of mind and matter:

> It is certain that mind, first of all, stands over against matter as a pure unity in the face of an essentially divisible multiplicity; moreover, our perceptions are composed of heterogeneous qualities, whereas the perceived universe seems to resolve itself into homogeneous and calculable changes. There would thus be inextension and quality, on the one hand, extensity and quality, on the other hand (318 / 181).

There is matter, a divisible multiplicity, with calculable relations of cause and effect. And there is mind, unextended and unitary. This, we may say, was the position with which in many ways ended *Time and Free Will,* if we disregard the implicit acknowledgement of its limitation that we noted in Chapter IV. It is an opposition of materialism and idealism of which we know Bergson rejects both sides. Materialism attempts to derive mind from divisible multiplicity, whereas idealism attempts to derive such multiplicity from qualitative and unextended mind. The problem as we have seen is how to avoid having unity or a synthetic act on one side, and external to, a multiplicity standing on the other side.

Similar to associationism, both materialism and idealism start from an already constituted world, which makes it impossible to see how "unity" and "multiplicity" could ever meet. Bergson thus writes that idealism assumes already existing concepts or ideas, whereas, as we have seen, recognition is a not a case of a preformed idea matching a ready-made perception, but rather, there is an always already *mixed* image that is part condensed past experience, part selection from received excitations (320 / 183). Materialism fails equally in that it substitutes for true experience a "disarticulated" and "disfigured" one, one already organised in light of our interests in the world (*ibid.*). Hence materialism already assumes the existence of discrete multiplicity. Idealism accepts from materialism “phenomena that are separate and discontinuous and simply endeavours to effect a synthesis of them which ... cannot but be arbitrary” (320 / 184). Such synthesis must remain external to its elements. This, for Bergson, ultimately leads to a rather disappointing conclusion as presented by critical philosophy, namely that all knowledge is relative and that ultimate reality is unknowable (*ibid.*).

> We start from what we take to be experience, we attempt various possible arrangements of the fragments which apparently compose it, and when at last we feel bound to acknowledge the fragility of every edifice that we have built, we end by giving up all effort to build ... (*ibid.*)

Yet, there is "one last enterprise" we might undertake:

> It would be to seek experience at its source, or rather, above that decisive *turn* where, taking a bias in the direction of our utility, it becomes properly *human* experience (*ibid.*.)

When Kant defined the limits of possible knowledge he effectively demonstrated the limits of an intellect bound by the exigencies of life (321 / 184). As Bergson will develop in much more detail in *Creative Evolution*, the intellect did not appear in the course of the evolution of life in order to aid in some quest for pure knowledge, but because it helped us survive (see EC, 131-3 / xxxvii-xxxviii). The intellect serves a *vital* function and not a merely speculative one (see e.g., MM 346 / 212). If it is true, as Bergson tried to show with the theory of pure perception, that with perception we are truly in things, but that this is a parts-to-whole relationship, since perception merely selects from the totality of influences received, then our perception would no longer be abstract. And if what we select serves a vital function, that is, related no longer to the way our minds are necessarily structured but relative to acquired habits, then perhaps we could "unmake" some of these habits "and so recover contact with the real" (321 / 185). That is, we would no longer be restricted to the Kantian limitations on knowledge.

Bergson therefore suggests a two-part method: to work against the utilitarian nature of the mind, a work of unmaking our acquired habits and something that requires effort (*ibid.*). Then, once we have regained the point where experience "turns" to utility, we must attempt to see if there are not any other resources available that can be developed in such a way as to create new ways of thinking. This two-part method, which we know from *Time and Free Will,* will also re-appear in *Creative Evolution.* In the first part, that we have discussed thus far, we have seen how Bergson distinguishes between a *ready-made* experience and this experience as the result of the twin processes of memory and perception. This distinction is now linked with yet another

distinction. On the one hand is the practical and conventional perspective that has been shown to consist of a needs-oriented selection from a totality. This is now contrasted with something he hesitantly starts to call "intuition":

> That which is is commonly called a *fact* is not reality as it appears to immediate intuition, but an adaptation of the real to the interests of practice and the exigencies of social life. Pure intuition, external or internal, is that of an undivided continuity (319 / 183).

It would seem, however, that in criticising Kant Bergson is using a insight that could only have been derived from Kant. As Kant had shown, if we start with the idea that representation is either a direct copy of the world, or that the world of knowledge is the world in itself, we will never be able to account for the rule-governed nature of our experience. The distinction between a form of knowledge that is conditioned by certain rules, and a form of knowledge that is knowledge of knowledge, a *Wissen vom Wissen,* as Fichte would say, this distinction is *the* critical tool *par excellence*. In fact it seems that Bergson reacts to a Kant that is most likely much closer to that of his neo-Kantian teachers. Neither for Kant, nor for Fichte, did transcendental philosophy (properly understood) contain a problem of an unknowable world. This "Jacobian" charge was not theirs because the distinction between transcendental and empirical knowledge was not intended to pertain to two aspects of reality. Rather, transcendental conditions are assumed to explain our experience of the world. We cannot explore this here and will have to return to this matter in the Conclusion. Suffice it to say that during the intervening period it had become conceptually plausible to distinguish between a form of habitual thought, adequate to a static, Newtonian world, and a

(direct) experience of mobile, becoming reality. For Bergson, Kant's conditions of experience only pertained to this conventional Newtonian world. Against this he wanted to free space for the experience of duration.

4.1 A triple opposition

After the "unmaking" of habitual thought in the first three chapters Bergson now turns to "immediate", and as it were, "purified", experience. In a rapid series of "suggestions" he outlines the metaphysics that have underpinned the project from the start.[9] The theories of pure perception and pure memory all concerned various forms of action. But in Chapter IV and onwards, the practical perspective gives way to a metaphysical one. Where Chapter I had as as subtitle: "Of the Selection of Images for Conscious Presentation", the subtitle of Chapter IV reads "The Delimitation and Fixation of Images"; no longer for their presentation in consciousness, but, as it were, *as such*.[10]

The problem of the unity of body and soul is that it involves a *triple* opposition: The soul is thought of as unextended, whereas the body is seen as (only) extended; the soul pertains to qualitative experience, the body to quantitative affects, and finally, the soul is said to be free, whereas the body is seen as determined (MM 373 / 244). If thought and perception are merely unextended qualities and the world a purely extended and quantitative multiplicity, then it is hard to see how the mind could represent the world. It could only lead to an epi-phenomenal mind, an idea Bergson thoroughly criticises in Chapter II.[11] If mind and world are separated in this triple manner, then it would seem that freedom would only pertain to the super-sensible. But

9 See also Worms, 1997, 191.
10 See also Worms, *op. cit.,* 193-4.
11 See also the later essay "The Soul and the Body" in PM.

if we could find a common source for both our experience and the world itself, if experience is as much a form of action as the material world, then perception would be just as much external as it would be internal. What Bergson now needs to show more clearly is how his previous analysis of experience in terms of movement and action equally applies to the extended, quantitative and necessitated world. This then is what he sets out to demonstrate in the remainder of the work.

4.2 Movement and space

In a series of four carefully numbered steps Bergson attempts to demonstrate that movement is real, indivisible and absolute, and that it is the division of matter into independent bodies that is an illusion (see MM 324-52 / 188-217). Movement is now simply asserted as fact by Bergson; something we may easily become aware of whenever we lift up our arm (324 / 188). But we tend to ignore this fact because we are almost naturally inclined to confuse the indivisibility of movement with the divisibility of its trajectory. Motion considered as movement is no longer considered an effect of the indivisibility of the mental act required by the experience of movement, rather, it is itself a "progress", whereas it is the trajectory A-B that should be seen as a "thing" (325 / 190). Only when the movement has stopped can we determine its trajectory. But then it would no longer be in motion. Hence we stand to confuse two very different phenomena.

The reality of motion becomes problematic when we try to reconcile the understanding of motion as found in mathematics with the one found in physics. For physics motion is clearly real as it indicates a real change in the state of the system. Yet

in mathematics motion is simply an increase in distance between points A and B. These two notions are irreconcilable. For mathematics the mobility of A in relation to B is equivalent to that of B in relation to A. But as Bergson quotes Henry More in his discussion with Descartes: "When I am quietly seated, and another, going a thousand paces away, is flushed with fatigue, it is certainly he who moves and I who am at rest" (330 / 194). What underlies this problem is our understanding of space. For movement to be real we would have to allow for a privileged point in space. If we could determine a fixed point then the movement of A in relation to B would no longer be equivalent to that of B in relation to A. But to determine a privileged point in space there seem to be only two options: either space itself is qualitatively organised, allowing us to determine real points in space, or space is relative to a second, encapsulating space. But both contradict with our understanding of space. To determine the distance between locations in a qualitative space we need to recourse to an underlying homogeneous grid. The notion of an encapsulating space leads to an infinite regress of encapsulating spaces. Therefore, if space is absolute, then we cannot have absolute positions in space.[12] If the idea of absolute space is self-contradictory, then "none of our mathematical symbols can express the fact that it is the moving body which is in motion rather than the axes or the points to which it is referred" (330 / 194, compare with DI, 153 / 234).[13]

For movement to be relative we need to assume absolute space, but this notion is self-contradictory. We thus need to separate the mobile aspect of movement from its

12 This point is further developed in his discussion with Einstein and the Peter and Paul examples. The point is that the only privileged point in space can only ever be *my perspective.* See Henri Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity,* trans. M. Lewis and Jacobs, L. (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 1999).

13 Whether this applies to all branches of mathematics and more specifically to any developments that Bergson was not or could not have been aware of I will have to leave to more knowledgeable people.

trajectory, understood as arising *post factum*. Hence motion is now understood by Bergson as a change of state or quality, or also as "absolute" or "qualitative" difference (MM, 332 / 196).

4.3 The illusion of independent bodies

If movement is real (of which the simple fact of raising my arm testifies) and this constitutes a real change in the system, should we then not rather say that it is the whole system that changes, rather than it being a merely local effect?

> A *moving continuity* is given to us, in which everything changes and yet remains: why then do we dissociate the two terms, permanence and change, and then represent permanence by *bodies* and change by *homogeneous movements* in space? (333 / 197)

Our study of consciousness has shown this to be the case, but, adds Bergson, so do the most recent advancements in science. Science agrees that all parts of matter act and react to each other. Appealing to the works of Faraday, Thomson and Lord Kelvin Bergson writes that the difference between object and force is progressively being abandoned:

> We see force more and more materialized, the atom more and more idealized, the two terms converging toward a common limit and the universe thus recovering its continuity. ... [T]hey show us, pervading concrete extensity, *modification, perturbations*, changes of *tension* or of *energy* and nothing else (353-7 / 200-201).

In the preceding chapters Bergson wrote that the division of movement into a sequence of positions on the one hand, and an unchanging body on the other hand, was the effect of the combined efforts of perception-as-selection and the working of memory. The two combine to result in the "image" or body that we perceive. Bergson more or less repeats this point here but does so in a way that hints of the main problem that will come to concern him in *Creative Evolution*. Now taking the perspective of what he calls "life" he writes that life will establish "at once" a "primary discontinuity" between the needs of the organism and that which serves to satisfy it (334 / 198). Our needs act as "so many searchlights" and these needs can only be satisfied if, within the continuity that is given to them (and the reference here is to the *needs* themselves), "they carve out, within this continuity, a body which is to be their own and then delimit other bodies with which the first can enter into relation" (*ibid.*). This special relation is what is called *life*.

The material world is a moving continuity. Within this moving continuity life effects the primary division. It is a division between needs and what may serve to satisfy those needs. If this is granted then the analysis of experience as given in the preceding will hold, because this analysis assumed "real centres of action". Hence the division of needs and what serves them gives us some intimation of how these centres are to be thought. But why we would assume this original division is not demonstrated. The deeper question of why life divides "at once" into needs and what may serve these needs, that is, of why life itself is fundamentally in need and why it is of a fundamentally *limited* nature, is one that Bergson implicitly raises but does not discuss. Neither does he discuss the second question of *how*, granted life's limited form, this

division into needs and what serves to satisfy it might be said to take place along, what Bergson himself later on referred to as, "natural articulations".[14] These two question, of *why* and of *how,* he will have to develop in *Creative Evolution.*What *Matter and Memory* effectively lacks is a *genetic* account of individuation.

The extended can no longer be understood as composed of unchanging corpuscles. The unextended, in its stead, can no longer be understood as some immaterial copy of the material world. The opposition of the extended and the unextended we now understand as the result of the practical orientation of the mind. That which does exist is what he calls *extensity* (Fr: *extension* 374 / 245). Extensity is somewhere in between the extended and the unextended. Extensity is a differentiated spatial materiality and a moving continuity that we both separate in, and represent by, an unchanging mobile traversing an homogeneous spatial grid.

4.4 Quantity versus quality

The second of the triple oppositions, of quantity and quality, Bergson writes, is "less artificial" and only becomes "radical" when combined with the above opposition of extended unchanging externality and inextensive perceptions (*loc. cit.*). Combine the two and we end up with quantitative, homogeneous changes in space versus qualitative and inextensive sensation in the mind. But as we have seen, sensation and the external world are united in action, both are as much "inside" as "outside". The question now becomes: how is it that the heterogeneous qualities that we perceive are connected to what appears as purely homogeneous movement in space? Only one hypothesis remains, claims Bergson in the very final pages of the book: concrete movement

14 See the later essay "Life and Consciousness" from PM.

possesses "something akin to consciousness" (376 / 247). That what could not have been claimed in *Time and Free Will* he is now able to affirm. Movement is real, that means, it is or has a temporal unity and not a series of discrete points in space. Movement has "memory" or "consciousness", not merely in the sense that they are all of the temporal order, rather than the spatial, but because movement too is internally organised. Movement is a temporal continuity and it allows for internal differentiation. It is this that allows Bergson to demonstrate the continuity of quantity and quality.

> Between sensible qualities, as regarded in our representation of them, and these same qualities treated as calculable changes, there is therefore only a difference in rhythm of duration, a difference in internal tension (*loc. cit.*)

For Bergson there is only a difference of tension between our knowledge of the colour red as composed of 400 billion successive vibrations and our qualitative experience of it. Our experience contracts these vibrations in one single experience. Although it is impossible for us to perceive all of these in their individuality, we may imagine an infinitely diluted consciousness that could.[15] Inversely, we may imagine a consciousness that is able to hold the entire history of mankind under its gaze (342 / 207). Think of how we are able to grasp the life of a fruit-fly within what for us is merely a single day. And even in our own lives we may experience different degrees of duration: in a sleep of minutes, days might seem to pass.

15 There is something distinctly odd about the way Bergson juxtaposes in this example an element of scientific knowledge, a seemingly unmediated realist claim about the world, with the lived experience of the same. As though his analysis here, one that critiques the idea that movement is composed of parts, does not apply to colour and its vibrations. As though single vibrations *do* exist, whereas the separate positions of a mobile do not.

> In reality there is no one rhythm of duration; it is possible to imagine many different rhythms which, slower or faster, measure the degree of tension or relaxation of different kinds of consciousness and thereby fix their respective places in the scale of being (*ibid,* compare also IM, 1416 / 33)

Between the infinitely diluted rhythm of duration of the individual vibrations of the colour red and our experience of this colour there is a difference of degree in *tension*. Our duration is able to contract these vibrations of matter into a single experience: "In short, then, to perceive consists in condensing enormous periods of an infinitely diluted existence into a few more differentiated moments of intenser life" (MM, 342 / 208). This contraction is, Bergson writes, the result of memory.

Our experience results from two actions. The almost homogeneous multiplicity of matter is contracted into qualities; this is the work of memory. Such a work is a work of unification or integration. The other action is the "cutting up" (*découpage*) of continuity into an unchanging mobile, its trajectory, and a stable background. This is the work of perception. These two accounts, of the contraction of memory and of the cutting up of perception are then brought together to show the continuity of freedom and necessity.

4.5 Necessity and freedom.

As we know from *Time and Free Will* Bergson rejects the choice between necessity and freedom. With *Matter and Memory* he thinks he has formulated the metaphysics that will let us understand their continuity. In *Time and Free Will* both freedom and necessity did not exist as absolutes, but rather consisted of degrees. Of what would absolute necessity consist? It would entail atomism, mechanicism and determinism. Atomism

claims self-subsisting, irreducible, unchanging, distinct and identical bodies. Mechanicism claims that change in the system ("surface-change") consists of a reconfiguration of particles. The reconfiguration is purely spatial and the particles themselves preserve identity throughout this reconfiguration. And it would entail determinism. Cause and effect entertain a purely unilateral relation. The cause influences the effect and never the other way around. Furthermore, the effect must be understood to exist in some pre-formed state within the cause. The cause itself is equally the effect of a preceding cause.

All three claims Bergson has undermined. Bodies cannot be separated from qualitative change, nor do they exist in isolation from the total system; rather, any change constitutes a qualitative change of the total system. Bodies are not self-grounding but a condensation or contraction effected on the continuity of duration by either life or perception. Change in the system is not local but every part acts and reacts on every other part. Cause and effect form a durational continuity but the effect can no longer be predicted from the cause because cause and effect relations never repeat themselves.

In a complex passage Bergson now brings together the account of perception and the account of memory to show how this lets us understand the continuity of freedom and necessity.

> To reply, to an action received, by an immediate reaction which adopts the rhythm of the first and which continues it in the same duration, to be in the present and in a present which is always beginning again – this is the fundamental law of matter: herein consists *necessity* (345 / 210).

Matter, as we have seen, is an extended continuum where everything acts and reacts on everything else. A pure form of perception would be equivalent to matter. It would only ever be in the present, a present that endlessly begins again. Such a creature would "adopt the rhythm" of the action received and would continue it "in the same duration". Such a reaction that hardly alters the received action is almost predictable. Bergson writes that perfect necessity would be the "perfect equivalence between the successive moments of duration" (376 / 247, tr. mod.). But we know that even the most pure perception already partakes of memory. Because existence is of the temporal order every action reverberates throughout the system. Such action, or movement, is continuous and irreversible. Hence a perfect equivalence of successive moments of duration can only exist in a hypothetical sense, just as pure memory only ever exists in a hypothetical sense. Memory and perception always intersect, being merely two sides of a single movement.

Within the material continuum life effects a primary discontinuity between needs and what serve to satisfy these needs. From the totality of actions received, the organism selects those that are of interest to it. This consists both of a solidification or contraction of rhythms of durations into higher order rhythms and of a "cutting-up" of the mobile continuity into quasi-stable bodies and underlying trajectories, into what interests us (the object perceived) and all that does not (a background). This is a modification of duration and such an organism is on the way to freedom:

> If there are actions that are really *free*, or at least partly indeterminate, they can only belong to beings able to fix, at long intervals, that becoming to which their own becomings cling, able to solidify it into distinct moments and so to

> condense matter and, by assimilating it, to digest it into movements of reaction which will pass through the meshes of natural necessity (345 / 210).

The organism selects and "condenses" the totality of action into matter. As a form of progressive organisation it is able to "assimilate" and "digest" a multitude of actions into more and more stable forms of action-reaction circuits or habits. These stable forms "condense" action into matter. The more it has stabilised action into matter-habits, the more selective it can be. When it has integrated action-reaction circuits into coherent forms of organisation it no longer needs to concern itself with these. The more the organism integrates actions into such circuits the more it will be able to make use of the synergy thus created to integrate inferior circuits into superior circuits. The body may thus be understood as composed of endless levels of action-circuits all working both collectively and individually. "The body" is really the name for a cut-off point, whether this be the individual organic body, the organ, or the cell. The higher it is organised, the more it is able to benefit from the collective experience of all its subservent parts.[16] Memory is a progressive work of re-organisation that contains within itself myriad degrees of contraction. The degree of integration of influences signals the degree in which an organism has a past. It is in having a living past that an organism is free. As Deleuze comments: "More past = more future, and thus freedom".[17] Bergson thus concludes:

> The greater or lesser tension of their duration, which expresses, at bottom, their greater or lesser intensity of life, thus determines both the degree of the

16 An contemporary account that is not inspired by the work of Bergson but one that ends up remarkably close to this understanding of the material body as composed of so many relatively closed circuits of action is found in the work of Varela and Maturna. See e.g., H.R. Maturna and F.J. Varela *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*, (Boston and London: Shambala, 1992), revised edition.

17 See Deleuze, 2007, 75.

concentrating power of their perception and the measure of their liberty (MM 345 / 210).

VI. A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

1. Introduction: The Body, Materiality and Space

In *Time and Free Will* Bergson showed that in order to do justice to the specificity of conscious states we needed to distinguish between two forms of organisation, duration and space. This resulted in a rather stark separation of the inner and the outer. In *Matter and Memory* the relation between two forms of organisation returned in a two-tiered question. The first part asks after the role of the body in the life of the soul; the second after their unity. What is the role of the body in the life of the soul? That is, if we now take duration as first reality, if we assume a mobile continuity then what becomes of the body, of materiality and of space? The body, Bergson wrote, is essentially there to *limit* the life of the soul. There is a mobile and temporal continuity, which means that all actions reverberate throughout the system. In what we could call a holism of action any local change effects a change of the overall system. Within this totality of action-reaction the body works as a screen: it filters out what requires attention and this depends on the needs of the organism. The body is a mechanism of selection and nothing more.

Life, Bergson wrote, effects a *primary discontinuity* between needs and what serves to satisfy them. From a wholly disinterested perspective, that is, from the perspective of immediate intuition, there is only continuity and indivisible movement. From a practical perspective, however, a perspective oriented by needs, a discontinuity is introduced. I select from the totality of influences that reach me those I need to respond to. I am not aware of the totality but I hear only those sound-frequencies that are relevant to me, I see only those light-frequencies that are important to me, I do not notice all that goes on within my body but I become aware of it when I feel hunger, pain, heat or cold.

In *Matter and Memory* the body, the practical perspective, action, and the present all line up on a single plane. The present is what interests me, what is actual and summons me to act, whereas the past consists of all those actions that are no longer of interest and no longer actual (MM, 280 / 137). That which interests me is dependent on my past life and this allows for the selection I make. Within this totality my perception constitutes a "quasi-instantaneous section ... in the flowing mass" and this is what we call the material world (*op.cit.,* 281 / 139). We carve the flowing mass into bodies, which we then perceive as unchanging and these make up the material world. *My body* is in the centre of all this, it is where I feel the influence of the world, it is where I act. Hence my body is the actuality of the present (*loc. cit.*).

1.1 Space, Infinity and the Future.

My body is a centre of action (280 / 138); it concerns the present. In the selection and solidification it effects on the flowing continuity a world composed of distinct and

relatively stable bodies appears. Where the past concerns actions that have lost their interest for me, that have stopped being actual, the future is full of interest. Whereas both the present and the past concern real action, the future is "impeding action" (286 / 144). The future is not a place, it is not a section of the line of time that already exists and to where we could travel. Rather, the future is a "promise" and not a location (*loc. cit.*). Because it recedes infinitely, Bergson writes that it is the schema of space that furnishes us with "the diagram of the near future" (*ibid.*).

Materiality, understood as bodies distinct from trajectories or space, is an effect of our practical interest, that is, of action. Space, as that which underlies bodies, is infinitely open. This infinite openness is a *quality* space borrows from the infinite openness of the promise. Spatial infinity and the infinitely open future are of the order of *quality*, not quantity.[1] Spatial infinity, in fact, cannot be thought in purely spatial terms (see Ch. V, Sect. 4.2). Spatial infinity is unthinkable because space is both an enclosure and without end.[2]

It is because we understand the future on the basis of the present and the past that the notion of spatial infinity first appears. We tend to equate the future as being of the same order as the present and past. The future is simply time that has not yet come

1 See the discussion on the sequence of number in *Time and Free Will:* "On the one hand we assume that [numbers] are identical, which is conceivable only on condition that these units are ranged alongside each other in a homogeneous medium; but on the other hand the third unit, for example, when added to the other two, alters the nature, the appearance and, as it were, the rhythm of the whole; without this interpenetration and this, so to speak, *qualitative progress*, no addition would be possible. Hence it is through the *quality of quantity* that we form the idea of *quantity without quality*." (DI 82 / 123, emp. added). See also R. Breeur, "Bergson and Sartre's Account of the Self in Relation to the Transcendental Ego," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 9, no. 2 (2001), 182-3.

2 Interestingly Russell, in his discussion of the Zeno paradoxes, refers to Bergson. Although commonly thought to differ, his views in fact do not seem to be in direct conflict with Bergson's. Russell shows that infinity cannot be attained through a process of addition. Infinity lies *outside* of any set, more so, it *cannot be part of any set*. He compares infinity with the activity of abstracting from a given set to attain a certain *quality* of that set. Hence we may conclude that Russell sees infinity as a different process and of a different order than the numerical. See "The Problem of Infinity Historically Considered", 187 esp., in *idem*, *Our Knowledge of the External World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993 [1914]).

to pass, whereas the past is that which has. We think of the future as *possible* time, that is, and as we have seen in Chapter IV, time that exists in some pre-formed, yet not-actual state. Whereas both the future and the past seem equally non-actual or non-present, the non-actuality of the past is, as Bergson stresses, a virtual one, meaning that it is *real* and can still be reactivated, something that happens often in our lives when an event from the past returns to haunt us. As he stressed in *Matter and Memory* the past is continued in the present because the present is a movement and a progress. The future, however, does not exist in any virtual state, *it does not exist at all*, rather, it is merely a possibility. The *near*-future is clearly indicated by the present and may to some extent be reliably predicted. However, and as Hume had already forcefully demonstrated, nothing prevents the future from differing from our predictions.[3] But because we tacitly assume the future to be some location in time, we tend to think of it as already prefigured *realiter* in the future. Time, the present, is always in the process of becoming (MM, 281 / 138), it is what is *en train de se fair.* The time it takes for a cube of sugar to melt has great philosophical significance because it shows us that events take time. The future is not and cannot already be here because the present is "that part of my duration which is in process of growth (*loc. cit.*). The possible is a form of pseudo-existence, preformed and *ready to go*, only waiting for the limitation on actual existence to be lifted. When we think of the future as a space-time amalgamation we are naturally led to assume its infinity. Infinity represented in purely spatial form is how we come to posit spatial infinity. Whereas materiality retains a vital function, abstract and homogeneous space is merely an illusion that we have constructed for ourselves.

3 See "Of the Idea of Necessary Connexion" in David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

1.2 Materiality and freedom

Materiality is related to action and the present. This materiality, as we have seen, allows for degrees. Our present includes all that is actual for us. We may well imagine that the present is less extensive for a fruit fly just as we may imagine beings for whom our present appears as rather limited. It is in this sense that Bergson writes that duration allows us "to affirm the existence of objects inferior and superior (though in a certain sense interior) to us" (IM, 1416 / 33). Not only are there inferior and superior durations, but these are *interior* to me, as I am interior to them. There are daily, monthly and yearly cycles *within* me, just as I partake in even longer cycles of generational and species-life "outside" of me. As Bergson tried to explain through the concept of memory, all these degrees of organisation are integrated within my existence. Hence the more I am able to integrate the durations around me, the more extensive my present, the more free I am to influence the material world (MM, 378 / 249). In this way Bergson was able to respond to the second question of the *union* of body and soul. Body and soul are reconciled because they are different degrees or different rhythms of duration.

1.3 A history of problems

Time and Free Will created a number of problems. Separating duration and space as different forms of organisation allowed Bergson to provide a more adequate account of conscious states and of the specific continuity involved in numbers and space. This in turn made it possible to demonstrate the irreducibility of conscious states. But it

remained problematic to see how a purely subjective duration combines with a purely objective space to produce our experience of movement. This problem is then resolved by choosing unequivocally for the reality and indivisibility of movement. The two separate forms of organisation now become two ideal limits of a single reality. Materiality is a lower degree of duration, and space is a mere abstraction. This solves the problem of the relative status of the two forms of organisation and also the *de jure* question of their unity. The more specific problem of *how* exactly the two combine is further developed through the concept of memory. Memory denotes different degrees of contraction that range from its most relaxed degree in pure necessity, to its most contracted degree in duration. Because memory is not a spatial concept but a temporal one all these different degrees exist internally to each other, or, as Bergson writes, in a *virtual* manner. The solution to a third problem already implicit in *Time and Free Will*, namely as to our access to, and knowledge of, the two forms of knowledge, although not thematised until *An Introduction to Metaphysics,* is implied in the distinction in *Matter and Memory* between a practical and interested perspective and the "immediate" and disinterested perspective of intuition.

But although having now either solved, or at least indicated, a solution to these problems, it also raises a new set of issues. Whereas a moving continuity is given to us, we experience a world of semi-permanent bodies moving against a relatively unchanging background. To explain how such a world of bodies appears, all Bergson needed was *a body* and *its needs*. It was said that *life itself* created this primary discontinuity. My needs structure the world into one composed of bodies. But what about *my body*? As Bergson wrote in *Matter and Memory:*

> [Needs] cannot satisfy themselves except upon the condition that they carve out, within this continuity, a body which is to be their own and then to delimit other bodies with which the first can enter into relation (MM, 334 / 198).

This raises a number of important questions. First of all, why does life effect a primary discontinuity? Why should life be characterised through an essential lack? What is this limitation that is either imposed on life, or if not imposed on it, then how is it internal to life?[4] Secondly, how does life individuate? In *Matter and Memory* individuation is relative to my perspective, this explained how we come to *perceive* separate bodies. But what about bodies themselves? The precise status of bodies remains ambiguous. In the quote above, Bergson clearly makes an ontological claim: needs carve out a body *for themselves*. Yet he writes this in a section that he gives the title "All division of matter into independent bodies with absolutely determined outlines is an artificial division" (MM, 332 / 196). If the perspective of needs is the practical perspective this helps us understand how we come to posit separate bodies in the external world, but what about the body that is to by my own, what about *my body*? My body has an absolute reality, it is not relative to perspective. Moreover, the account in *Matter and Memory* hinges on *real* centres of action, that is, real bodies (see MM, 172 / 20). Bergson will have to give an ontological account of individuation.

The two problems of the limited nature of life and of life's individuation are related to a third problem that appears with *Matter and Memory*. Of the original two forms of organisation, we are now left with just one. As Worms notes, "[i]n becoming a

4 Canguilhem calls life's limited force one of the "secretly important presuppositions" of Bergsonism. See Georges Canguilhem, “Commentaire au troisième chapitre de L'Évolution créatrice,” *Annales bergsonienne* 3, no. Bergson et la science (2007), 124. Original in *Bulletin de la Faculté des lettres de* Strasbourg, t. XXI, no, 5-6, mars-avril 1943, 126-43, and mai 1943, 199-214.

difference of degree within duration, the difference between body and spirit, abandons, as it were, space!"[5] Although Bergson is able to salvage materiality as a lower degree of duration, space as a self-subsisting form of organisation has become a mere abstraction. In fact, when I say that it is memory that allows us to understand degrees of difference between duration and space, what I should have said was that it is *duration itself* that allows for these degrees, as memory is essentially duration. But if space is a mere abstraction then this creates the problem of how to understand the possibility of mathematics. As a schoolboy Bergson was a rather promising mathematician. He decided to forego this career to pursue one in philosophy (and was told by his teacher that he would come to regret this)[6]. But Bergson remained dedicated to mathematics throughout his life[7]. To claim that space is a mere fiction renders much of mathematics impossible. Bergson will have to show that space is somehow rooted in reality itself. Hence we will see Bergson partly returning to the position of *Time and Free Will*.

2. Life and death

To the three problems of life's essential lack, life's individuation and the precise status of space, we must add a forth and final problem. This problem of the difference between "interruption" and "inversion" takes up the three problems and it will be this problem to which we will devote the majority of our discussion. After having shown how to understand the unity of body and soul, it will be the question of *life* that forces Bergson to reconsider a vital difference between the duration and space. The account of

5 Worms 2004, 165.
6 Philip Soulez and Frédéric Worms *Bergson, Biographie* (Flammerion, 1997), 45.
7 As witnessed by his encounter with Einstein in 1922. See Bergson's *Duration and Simultaneity*.

degrees of contraction and of rhythms of duration as an explanation of the continuity of body and soul cannot, at least *prima facie*, account for the very real difference there is between the organic and the anorganic and between a body with a soul and a body without one. Although Bergson displays a real reluctance to speak of death, it is precisely the death of an organism that reveals most clearly the difference between body and soul.[8] Between a dead body and a living body there seems to be no apparent material difference yet all that is left for a dead body is "a letting go". Can we say that if a dead body falls completely under the laws of entropy and dispersion, that then a living body falls under these laws of dispersion *but also under another law*, a law of life and progressive or vital organisation?

The question of death in Bergson's philosophy of life has thusfar received little attention. This is unfortunate as it could very well shed a whole new light on his philosophy. Jean Hyppolite in his “Du Bergsonisme à l'existentialisme”, written not long after the Second World War (1949), writes that the absence of a meditation on human mortality is precisely the breaking-point between Bergsonism and existentialism, and ultimately between Bergsonism and Christianity.[9] For Bergson a "*sérénité finale*" is even more than a possibility but will become a reality once we give ourselves over to, or return to, our original participation in the Whole.[10] But for existentialism, for Hyppolite in agreement here with Christianity, man must be seen as ultimately a failure and an impassible limit, a being who can only be saved through the mystery of faith and by the

8 Death is mentioned at EC, 704n, 725 / 158n, 173, furthermore in the section "Individuality and Age", esp. 12. To my knowledge it has not received a great deal of attention in the literature. I would like to extend my gratitude to the organisers, speakers and participants of the very interesting conference "*Au-delà de la philosophie de la vie. Ateliers sur* Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion" held at the University of Tokyo on the 18th of October 2007 (organised by Centre for Death and Life Studies, Susumu Shimazono (dir.)) where the question of relation of Bergson's thought to death came up on a number of occasions.

9 Jean Hyppolite "Du Bergsonisme à l'existentialisme" in *Figures de la pensée philosophique* (Paris: PUF, 1971), 448

10 *Op. cit.,* 453.

grace of God. Where Bergson believes in the transcendence of the human condition, existentialism feels itself "*impuissant*", other than through faith, to transcend this condition. Because faith cannot be philosophically justified, existentialism signals a profound crisis of philosophy.[11] Hyppolite wrote this after the Second World War, a war of which Bergson saw the beginnings but not the end (Bergson died in 1941). A number of key commentators that we will discuss in this chapter wrote during the war. The horrible experiences of this war lie as an almost unbridgeable gulf between Bergson and post-war philosophy. Although I do share this sense of lack, I think that the question of death should not be posed without a meditation on life, and here there is still much to learn from the study of Bergson.

2.1 Fichte and Spencer

Bergson, on his own admission, does not "feel qualified to settle the question" of life and death (EC, 509 / 12). The difference that needs to be discussed he feels lies rather between "the organised" and "the unorganised" (*op. cit.,* 656 / 122). In the fascinating opening section to Chapter III on "The Method in Philosophy" Bergson criticises two types of philosophy, exemplified by two philosophers, he "happened to have just brought together": Herbert Spencer and Johann Fichte. He criticises Spencer and Fichte for not having seen "the cleft" (*la coupure*) between the organised and the unorganised:

> Between the organized and the unorganised they do not see and they will not see the cleft. Some [*i.e.,* Spencer] start from the inorganic, and, by compounding it with itself, claim to form the living; others [*i.e.,* Fichte] place life first, and proceed towards matter by a skilfully managed *decrescendo*; but, for both, there

11 *Op. cit.,* 458.

> are only differences of *degree* in nature - degrees of complexity in the first hypothesis, of intensity in the second (*op. cit.,* 656 / 122-3)

The accidental meeting of the two is not really that arbitrary because we know that in his younger years Bergson was an enthusiastic follower of Spencer's evolutionary determinism.[12] But he soon parted ways. Bergson writes towards the very end of *Creative Evolution*: "the usual device of the Spencerian method consists in reconstructing evolution with fragments of the evolved" (EC*,* 802 / 232). Spencer's fault, says Bergson, lies in not seeing the difference in nature between "the evolved" and evolution, between the *ready-made* individual and that which is always *en train de se faire*, namely*,* life itself. Spencer attempts to reconstruct life by adding complexity to simple terms, an undertaking that is bound to fail in Bergson's eyes.

For Fichte Bergson displays a bit more sympathy. Fichte too, we know Bergson studied well. Fichte pays "more respect to the true order of things, [though this] hardly leads us any further" (*op. cit.,* 656 /122). Bergson continues:

> Fichte takes thought in a concentrated state, and expands it into reality (*ibid.*).

Fichte starts with consciousness and then aims to deduce matter, where this deduction is seen as a movement of descent (*descresendo*). Bergson writes that Fichte starts from *life*. Yet Fichte's failure is similar to Spencer in that between life and matter both see only a difference of degree; be it one of *intensity* in the case of Fichte, and one of *complexity* in the case of Spencer.

12 See Jean de la Harpe, 1943, 358-9.
Spencer (1820-1903) coined the phrase "survival of the fittest" and championed the value of individual competition. Key works: *Principles of Ethics, Principles of Biology* and *Principles of Sociology.*

For Bergson an intensification of complexity can never produce "the simple", whereas the simple can lead to complexity. The simple movement of my hand, looked at purely from the outside may be broken down into separate positions and an external relation between these positions. So, at least as far as this point is concerned, Bergson will have to side with Fichte. But Fichte also does not start with a homogeneous kind of intensity. *Tathandlung* is both simple, or "one movement", *and* internally differentiated. Fichte's "deduction" is not a gradual descent into increasingly less intense forms of life but a constant navigation of quantitative and qualitative difference. For all its shortcoming, the descent Bergson criticises is closer to his own account from *Matter and Memory,* than it is to Fichte's. Perhaps this is why it was convenient for Bergson to pass-over the question of the alleged equivalence of intensity and complexity as evinced in this passage.

2.2 Inversion or interruption?

One of the questions for *Creative Evolution* concerns the specificity of life. There is a real difference, a "cleft", between the organised and the unorganised. We do not get from the organised to the unorganised through a simple difference in degree. As Bergson will repeatedly stress in *Creative Evolution,* life and matter *interrupt* each other:[13]

> All our analyses show us, in life, an effort to remount the incline that matter descends. In that, they reveal to us the possibility, the necessity even of a process the inverse of materiality, creative of matter by its **interruption** alone. (...) It has not the power to reverse the direction of physical changes, such as the principle of Carnot determines it. It does, however, behave absolutely as a force would

13 On interruption see also EC, 666, 672, 681, 682, 696, 703 / 129, 134, 140, 141, 152, 157.

> behave which, left to itself, would work in the inverse direction. Incapable of *stopping* the course of material changes downwards, it succeeds in *retarding* it (EC*,* 704 / 158, emp. added in bold).

There are two powers, or two forces, spirituality and materiality, and each strives to undo the work of the other. The living organism is the equilibrium that results from this conflict (*op. cit.,* 706 / 160). Life is a work of progressive organisation, of higher levels of contraction, of being able to synthesise more and more influences, and this, as we have seen in *Matter and Memory*, indicates the extent of its freedom. But this work takes place in a living body and it is the material aspect of the body that works against it. The body is subject to Carnot's law of the degradation of energy, of entropy. The material world is on a downward slope towards heat-death and interestingly it is here that we find the footnote on death alluded to previously. In this footnote Bergson disputes the idea that everything tends towards death. Matter is a descent into inertia and stasis and life is incapable of stopping. What it can do is delay it.[14]

This *Manichean* account of two opposed forces seems a regression from the account given in *Matter and Memory.* In that work duration was the highest *degree* of contraction; matter was the lowest *degree* of duration. The *unity* of body and soul was made possible because we pass by "imperceptible stages" from the one to the other. But although, as Jankélévitch suggests, this seems to take us back to *Time and Free Will,* Bergson does not renounce the results from *Matter and Memory.*[15] As Bergson writes at the start of the section entitled "The Ideal Genesis of Matter":

14 In that footnote Bergson goes on to suggest that perhaps life *wills* death, see *op. cit.,* 158n.
15 See Jankélévitch 1999, 169.

> [It] was necessary to show how the real can pass from tension to extension and from freedom to mechanical necessity by way of *inversion* (EC, 696 / 152, emp. added.).

The "dynamic monism"[16] of *Matter and Memory* is reaffirmed in this passage. If spirituality and materiality are two wholly distinct and opposing forces, each possessing its own positivity, then we would be in want again of a middle term. It was precisely duration-as-memory, with its different degrees of contraction all internal to each other, that served to unify the two forms of organisation from *Time and Free Will.* As Deleuze said "memory is the coexistence of degrees of difference (...). The meaning of memory is to give the virtuality of duration itself an objective consistency."[17] *Creative Evolution* does refer to this earlier work on memory, but memory no longer plays anything like the role it had before.[18] In fact, it is not really easy to see where exactly Bergson stands on all this. Taken at face value interruption and inversion refer to two quite different types of relations. Interruption is something that causes a rupture, something that breaks up a previous continuity, whereas an inversion constitutes a change in direction. The German terms *Unterbrechung* and *Umkehrung* express this clearly: one is a breaking asunder, the other a turning around. Where inversion could be something that happens internally, as when a ship turns around and changes direction, interruption has a clear external sense: it is something that causes the interruption of something else; an interrupted ship's voyage means it has stopped moving. Inversion seems to imply monism and interruption dualism. The two then cannot simply be equated, *yet this is precisely what Bergson intends to show:* that inversion means interruption:

16 See Milič Čapek 'Bergson's theory of the mind-brain relation' in *Bergson and modern thought* (Harwood: Chur, 1987), A.C. Papanicolau and P.A.Y. Gunter eds, 132.
17 Mullarkey 1999, 55.
18 On memory in EC see 498-9, 508 / 3-4, 11.

> Behind "spirituality" (...) and “materiality" (...), there are then two processes opposite in their direction, and we pass from the first to the second by way of inversion, or perhaps even by simple interruption, if it is true that inversion and interruption are two terms which in this case must be held to be synonymous, as we shall show at more length later on (*op. cit.,* 666/ 129).[19]

Contrary to what Bergson claims we find no explicit discussion of either the precise difference between interruption and inversion or of how they are supposed to be seen as synonymous. This does not mean the solution is not there but it is, as Jankélevitch writes, it is "indicated" rather than made explicit.[20]

The question of interruption and inversion plays at two levels as it is at the same time a question that is internal to *Creative Evolution* and a question of the coherence of *Creative Evolution* with his earlier works. Bergson claimed to have written each work in forgetting all the others,[21] and we should add, in, as it were, "absorbing" them, precisely in the way that memory is described. Indeed, speaking on this matter towards the end of his life Bergson went on to say said that his books did not always cohere and he noted that the time of *Time and Free Will* did not "gell with" (*ne "colle" pas avec*) the one from *Creative Evolution*.[22] Although it is important to see how the problem develops, and indeed, this we have tried to show in the two preceding chapters, we must resist the temptation to contrast *Creative Evolution* with the preceding work in any direct manner. True to his own method Bergson demanded from himself an effort unique for each subject. *Creative Evolution* thus takes up all the points from *Time and Free Will* and

19 See also EC 672-3, 681, 683, 696, 703 / 134-5, 140, 143, 152, 157-8, where Bergson repeatedly uses the two in a single sentence without clear distinction.
20 Jankélévitch, 1999, 175.
21 De la Harpe, 1943, 360.
22 *ibid*. See also "Introduction II", PM 1329-30 / 89-90.

Matter and Memory but it will also subtly rework these. The one work cannot be placed alongside the other in any straightforward sense.

2.3 Monism or dualism?

A comprehensive understanding of the problem of inversion and interruption can only unfold as our reading of *Creative Evolution* progresses. But what can we say to clarify this problem? A part of the problem of inversion and interruption is the problem of monism and dualism. On the one hand, Bergson cannot and does not renounce the monism attained in *Matter and Memory*. Between the body and the soul, between the material and the spiritual there certainly are differences but these do not lie between a material and an immaterial world. Difference lies not between matter and time, because matter is inscribed within duration. The material has become and will remain a degree of the temporal. There are different degrees of contraction, which are as many degrees of action and they range from freedom to (near) necessity. There is no epi-phenomenalism or adoubling of reality. Perception is not a copy of the world but a *selection* from the totality of influences; perception is thus very much part of the world. Although Bergson speaks of the difference between the spiritual and the material, the spiritual is not immaterial and the material is not a-spiritual. Rather, both exist as tendencies and not as separate worlds.

The question of monism and dualism first came up in an article from 1912 by Rev. Joseph de Tonquédec titled 'M. Bergson, est-il moniste?'[23] De Tonquédec asked whether there is a place in the philosophy of Bergson for God as a reality distinct from

23 Partially reprinted in the supplements to the *L'évolution créatrice,* edition "Le choc Bergson" (Paris: PUF, 2008), F. Worms (ed.), 618-33. Original in *Études par des Pères de la compagnie de Jésus*, t. CXXX, no 1, 1912, 506-16.

that of the world. To this de Tonquédec answers in the negative: "Nowhere do we perceive a creative act as heterogeneous to what it creates".[24] Because, according to De Tonquédoc, Bergson denies this distinction, he writes that Bergsonism is a form of monism.[25] Interestingly Bergson did not agree and responded that a free and creative God was rather a *consequence* from *Creative Evolution*: God may be seen as that out of which both matter and life spring forth.[26] However, a spiritual world, or God, or *duration,* as existing alongside the material world in some quasi-material parallel world clearly is not Bergson's position. Hence the idea of a Creator-God as both a separate reality and active in this world would have to be denied. All action and all movement, be they of matter or of life, take place in one and the same world.

But although all is movement or action or duration, this does not mean that all actions are of the same kind. To return to the passage discussed above, Bergson is insistent that there is a real difference between the organised and the unorganised. Jankélévitch writes: "What Bergson denounced and pursued without relent, both with the Spencerians as with the Romantics [think again of Fichte -MK], is the idea of a single or unique science, whether this be grounded on the notion of life, or on the notion of a mechanistic causality."[27] Although all actions take place in the same world, there are different kinds of causes at work in the organised and the unorganised, working in diverging directions. On the one hand, there is the interminable degradation of "downward" material changes; on the other hand, there is true creation of the forms

24 *Op. cit.,* 627.
25 *Op. cit.,* 620.
26 In a private letter to De Tonquédec, in *op. cit.,* 632. Also reproduced in M, 964. Note that this exchange took place prior to Bergson's later adhesion to Catholicism. Although he never converted because as he said in the last years of the life and leading up to the Second World War, he wanted to "stay among the persecuted", he did ask for a Catholic priest to pray at his funeral. See Soulez and Worms, 1997, 227.
27 Jankélévitch as cited most approvingly by Canguilhem. See Canguilhem 2007, 130

of life. Both these developments or tendencies are real, different and opposed to one another. Hence Bergson now also refers to them as forces. There are two forces and they are both "absolute" (EC, 664 / 128). Materiality is also an absolute. Hence when we abstract from it to produce the schema of space this does not take place *ins Blaue hinein* but has a footing in the real. But then how can materiality simultaneously be *a mere degree* of spirituality? This then, is the problem that inversion/interruption aims to address.

3. The interruption thesis

3.1 Spirituality and materiality

Bergson criticises science and philosophy for having assumed the unity, or we could say *univocity,* of existence. From his Doctoral Thesis onwards Bergson has consistently stressed that conscious phenomena, and this includes life, have a form of organisation different from that claimed to exist in a deterministic system. There is a rupture between the organised and the unorganised and as long as we do not see this as a qualitative difference we will inadvertently conceive of it as a mere difference of degree, which then leads us to posit no real difference between the deterministic, repetitive movements as perceived in the material world and the creative and unique actions of the living world. Not seeing this rupture means reconstructing the simplicity and totality of the *being-made* with fragments of the *already-made.*

Life is the *modus vivendi* that results from two "currents", or two forms of organisation (EC, 706, see also 784-5 / 160, 218-9): spirituality and materiality (*op.*

cit., 666 / 129). Although each strives to undo the work of the other, a delicate and dynamic balance is struck, and this is the living or "organised" body (704 / 158). The spiritual force, as we know, is duration itself. It is a constant work of integrating the present into the past and of pushing the concentrated experience of the past into the future. Duration, which is of the temporal order, is not restricted in the way that matter would be: all actions reverberate throughout the system. And all these actions continue all the actions of the past. Hence it is a Whole that swells in its entirety, one gigantic memory. Therefore life as duration is irreversible, cannot be repeated and is always unique *de jure*. Life as duration is an *ascent* to ever higher integration and concentration.

The material tendency constitutes a *downward* change.[28] The second law of thermodynamics states that physical changes tend to degrade into heat and that heat is distributed in a progressively uniform manner throughout the system. "It tells us that changes that are visible and heterogeneous will be more and more diluted into changes that are invisible and homogeneous, and that the instability to which we owe the richness and variety of the changes taking place in our solar system will gradually give way to the relative stability of elementary vibrations continually and perpetually repeated" (EC, 701 / 156). Materiality is a tendency towards homogeneity and repetition. Such a tendency Bergson sees as an *unmaking of matter itself* (*op. cit,* 702-4 *passim*, 725 / 157-9, 174). This is something life cannot stop or reverse; it cannot even free itself from it: "Incapable of *stopping* the course of material changes downwards, it succeeds in *retarding* it" (703 / 158). In Chapter II Bergson shows how life strives to

28 On ascent and descent see also Sylvain Roux, "L'ambiguïté néoplatonicienne: Bergson et la philosophie grecque dans L'Évolution créatrice" Conference paper, 2007, available via http://www.europhilosophie.eu/recherche/IMG/pdf/Sylvain_Roux.pdf (last accessed September, 2009).

store some of the Sun's dissipated heat through chlorophyllian function of plants. The leaves of plants thus created in turn serve as energy to animals, recycling the Sun's energy even further (585-609 / 69-88). Life recycles entropic heat-loss, passing iton from organism to organism.

Living organisms are the dynamic result of two processes. On the one hand, life is the constant creation of form; it is a "generative force" (636 / 107). Life is an *élan vital*, a vital impulse (see *e.g.*, 569-78 / 57-63). On the other hand, life is "attached to matter" (703 / 158); it undergoes the resistance of matter (578, 592-3 / 64, 75) and is continually threatened to be *unmade* by matter. Because life needs matter, life is a *limited* force (*e.g.,* 504, 602, 618, 621-2 / 8, 82, 92, 96, 97). Because the living organism is the result of a tendency towards spirituality and a tendency towards materiality Bergson writes:

> For, as soon as we are confronted with true duration, we see that it means creation, and that, if *that which unmakes itself endures* (*se qui se défait dure*), it can only be because it is inseparably bound to what is *making itself* (785 / 219, emp. added, transl. mod, see also 666 / 129).

The *enduring of what is being unmade* is the living body and this is something that is *making itself* against its constant "unmaking". The "self-making" aspect is the spiritual tendency, the "unmaking" aspect the material one. The living organism uses or reorganises matter. But this matter is a constant dissipation of organisation. The living organism needs to constantly repair the entropic damage of materiality.

3.2 The surplus of life

Most of the effort of the organism will be spent in maintaining a fine balance between destruction and creation. But as Bergson remarks in the footnote on death to which I have already alluded, life is not interested in any particular individual, but only in the whole (704n / 158n). It hopes that somewhere along the line a *surplus* might be created (629 / 102), and it is this that is the true purpose of life. This surplus is the aim of the true *creative* effort of life; the moment it not only overcomes obstacles but is truly free.

The living organism should not be seen as an individual thing but as (part of) a process, again part of other, higher-level processes of species-life, *et cetera*. Or rather, the living organism is the *modus vivendi* of *two* processes: a making and an *unmaking*. As an *unmaking* the living organism is no different from matter, with its entropic tendencies. But clearly it is not as an *unmaking* that the organised differs from the unorganised, or that life differs from inert matter: it is its "making of itself", its *se faisant,* that sets it apart. It is this self-making that Bergson constantly tries to explain. As we know this involves memory, duration, creation.

Although Bergson rejects all notions of intrinsic finality (i.e. taking the individual organism as purpose, rather than the whole of life), he does end this remarkable section on "Mankind" by speaking of the destiny of life as the conquest of matter, and "perhaps even death" (EC, 721-5 / 171-3).[29] We may speculate that the overcoming of death, and as he writes in the closing lines to his very last work, *The Two Sources,* about

29 As Philip Soulez relates, according to J.L. Vieillard-Baron, Bergson is one of the few French philosophers who uses "destination" in a strong sense and suggests this might well be linked to the lecture course on Fichte's *The Vocation of Man*. Mentioned by Philip Soulez (without citing location) in his "Presentation" to FCI, 147n.

the universe as a "machine for the making of gods" (TSMR, 1245 / 306) has everything to do with this surplus. It is the surplus, which life, perhaps wholly unwittingly, creates, that allows for a creature that is able to *reflect* on its own conditions. Such reflection, pursued in a mystical direction, would lead life to become one again with itself.

3.3 Bergson beyond Kant with Fichte

Materiality is a tendency towards homogeneity and repetition and this explains how our notion of space is not just a mere figment of our imagination. Our idea of space is a reflection on and development of a tendency inherent in matter itself (EC, 680 / 140). In this way Bergson not only repairs a shortcoming of the argument from *Matter and Memory* in that later on he may claim an *intuition* of space, but it allows him to do another thing as well. As we have seen, one of Bergson's ambitions was to provide an alternative to Kant's transcendental deduction (see Ch. V, Sect. 4). Bergson criticises Kant for having made knowledge relative to the contingencies of human perception. Bergson wrote that if we were to seek experience at its source we would come to see that our knowledge is a form of action, and that, although as a mere selection it would no longer apply to the whole of reality, it may, however, now be understood as *a part of* reality, and therefore as no longer relative to the contingencies of our perceptual apparatus (MM, 320 / 184). The source from which the intellect is said to spring he has now found and it is this that *Creative Evolution* tries to develop.

Although Bergson claims to offer an alternative to Kant we may equally consider it as an *extension* of the Kantian project. As Bergson writes in the Introduction, a theory of life and a theory of knowledge must be seen as inseparable. The distinction between

a theory of life and a theory of knowledge is in many ways similar to the Kantian distinction between everyday empirical understanding and philosophical understanding: "A theory of life that is not accompanied by a criticism of knowledge is obliged to accept, as they stand, the concepts which the understanding puts at its disposal" (EC, 492 / xxxvii). Such a knowledge would be a mere symbolism (*ibid.*), or we could say, an *uncritical* philosophy. Bergson then goes on to say:

> On the other hand, a theory of knowledge which does not replace the intellect in the general evolution of life will teach us neither how the frames of knowledge have been constructed nor how we can enlarge or go beyond them (*ibid.*).

For Kant, epistemology without experience would be empty, that is, without content and empirical justification, a form of *Schwärmerei* or just idle speculation. But Bergson is not only interested in justification ("how the frames of knowledge have been constructed") but he also wants to *extend* the frames of knowledge. Such extended thought would be more appropriate to life as duration. What Bergson wants to show is that our frames of knowledge are only so many deeply ingrained *habits* of consciousness.[30] We are used to think time as space because it is the natural inclination of the mind to think material and inert objects, not duration. But we can resist this inclination and think differently. It takes a "painful effort" but it can be done (see IM, 1415 / 32).

Deleuze, in his lecture course on Chapter III of *Creative Evolution*, says that whereas Kant had wanted, though more implicitly than explicitly, to trace the *genesis of*

30 Here we see the profound modification of Kantianism towards a pragmatism that took place in the 19th Century. We will discuss the change that took place from Kant, via Fichte to Bergson in the Conclusion.

the understanding, Fichte (and Deleuze also includes Maïmon), in desiring to fulfill the Kantian project, also wanted to trace the genesis of matter.[31] For Bergson, says Deleuze, Kant's positing of space *already* posits matter and intelligence, but this is a purely intellectualistic kind of matter. Space can only be understood on the basis of matter and intelligence and not the other way around. It thus fails to answer the "true problem of Kantianism", which is: "in what way are receptivity and spontaneity in harmony?"[32] In *Creative Evolution* Bergson will posit the reciprocal adaptation of matter and intellect. Hence we may see Bergson's embeddedness in the post-Kantian completion of the Kantian system. Matter and intellect, or consciousness and the thing in itself, should not be seen as two ready-made schemata but as engaged in a co-determining, or reciprocal genesis. Although Fichte lacks Bergson's temporal understanding, his emphasis on reciprocal determination of the I and not-I, and of activity and passivity, clearly has laid much of the ground-work for this later move by Bergson.

Bergson appreciates the fact that Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic had demonstrated that extension is not a material attribute like other attributes, such as heat and colour. Rather, it is an *a priori* form of perception, because our mind, without the need for any empirical experience (i.e., in mathematics) is able to correctly determine the properties of space. On this Bergson agrees with Kant (EC, 668 / 131). But for Kant the mind only finds in matter the mathematical properties is has already deposed in it; never can we claim that it pertains to reality "in itself" (*op. cit.*, 668-70 / 131-2). Now for Kant, still according to Bergson, space is a ready-made form of our perception, and the same holds for the thing in itself. But if this is so then how are these two supposed to fit? It seems there are but three options: either the thing

31 Deleuze, 2007, 77-8.
32 *Op. cit.,* 78.

determines the mind, the mind determines the thing, or there is some pre-established harmony. None of these options satisfy Bergson. But what if space were not ready-made as given but allowed for *degrees of spatiality (loc. cit.*)? If the abstract space of mathematics was a more extreme degree of a spatiality already inherent in matter itself, and perception, as form of action, were to become a degree of extensity, then we would be able to resolve in one single stroke the problem of the non-illusory nature of mathematics and the non-relative nature of perception![33]

What Bergson proposes to demonstrate is that the forms of thought are co-genetic with the forms of life. In the course of evolution life has taken form and this taking of form is very much the result of the practical, or action-oriented nature of life. As Bergson already hinted in *Matter and Memory,* life sets up circuits of relatively closed actions-reactions, or habits, so that it can all the better direct its attention. These circuits are what we call living, or organised, matter. And as we have also already seen, recognition and discernment, perception and memory, enter into it *immediately,* and not first after some preliminary stage of "non-life". In the evolution of life such discernment has co-evolved and so Kant's *a priori* categories are only so many *habits* of thought. Somewhat in opposition to *Matter and Memory* these habits are not merely illusions, but as Bergson will stress in the Second Introduction that he will prefix to *Matter and Memory* in 1910, such habits are *factitious* (MM, 168 / 16, but also see EC, 664 / 128).

33 We see how this idea of there being *degrees* of spatiality mirrors Fichte's solution to the problem of the thing in itself. For Fichte, the thing in itself, and the determination by thinking are two poles that range from activity to passivity. The introduction of degrees between I and not-I is precisely intended to show their continuity and to prove epistemic monism. Epistemic monism would claim that I am always already engaged with the world and so no form of knowledge exists of the world outside of any relation to me. Philosophy is not another kind of knowledge with its own separate domain in reality, but it is an internal reflection on knowledge. Bergson does not always seem to agree with Fichte on this point, since he is also commited to immediate experience. Yet for Bergson too, knowledge is a form of action. Bergson too would deny knowledge or experience of the word as it is, outside of any relation to me. His immediate knowledge is rather one that is not mediated by the conventional, habitual orientation of practical thought.

They serve a purpose, but we should not apply them incorrectly.[34] This very Kantian inspired notion of the *legitimacy* of knowledge-claims means that the habits of thought are perfectly adequate to life, practically considered (i.e., as ready-made forms on which to act), but *not* when applied to life-as-duration.

Part of the solution had been demonstrated with *Matter and Memory*: perception is *in* things; as form of action it is already extensive. Space, as reciprocal externality of homogeneous parts, was the result of an abstraction effected by us on what he called "real extension". What was missing was an account of the materiality of the world itself and its relation to our understanding, to show how this abstraction is anchored in reality. It is this that the dual genesis of matter and intellect aims to demonstrate.

4. Interruption or Inversion?

4.1 A Manichean opposition of Good and Evil

Life as a *modus vivendi* of a spiritual force and a material force leads to a rather Manichean account of existence. It sees life as composed of Good and Evil. We can never completely root out Evil as all things partake of Evil, but we must constantly strive to rid ourselves of it and aim to ascend to the Good alone. Bergson:

> Consciousness and matter appear to us, then, as radically different forms of existence, even as antagonistic forms, which have to find a *modus vivendi* (*op. cit.,* 824 / 13).

34 In *The Two Sources* Bergson will speak of the vital need for a *fonction fabulatrice*. See Jean-Christophe Goddard, "L'image de l'élan vital dans le chapitre II des Deux sources de la morale et de la religion," (2007b, conference paper).

Vladimir Jankélevitch, probably the most erudite of Bergson's commentators, clearly takes this line when on two occasions he speaks of matter and intellect as necessary evil.[35] For him life in essence has no need for a body but the only true reality is the creative effort of life itself.[36] The body is there and needs to be dealt with but it is really only a negative reality:

> The body represents a partial interruption of life, same as the idea that is a negation of thought and rest that is a negation of movement.[37]

But does this not conflict with the account given in Chapter IV of *Matter and Memory*, he asks?[38] No, because there is also an essential form of cooperation between the two. The answer as to how this is supposed to work displays an ambiguity that is quite particular to the issue we are after. Matter, or incarnation, has an important function to play in bringing out an important quality of life, but at the same time it must not be seen as a thing but as a tendency that opposes life.

Matter is not merely a necessary evil because it also makes that life becomes *pour soi* and not just *en soi*.[39] Hence matter also has a necessary role to play within life. Matter constitutes an obstacle or a resistance and it is this that makes life the creative effort that it is: "*elle provoque l'effort*".[40] We could say that life without the resistance of matter would be unlimited or absolute; as Fichte writes, the I needs a "check" for it's infinite striving to become experience. Bergson:

35 Jankélévitch, 1999, 169, 177. The first edition of this work appeared in 1931.
36 *Op. cit.,* 168
37 *Loc. cit.*
38 *Op. cit.,* 170
39 *Ibid*.
40 *Op. cit.,* 171

> For we feel that a divinely creative will or thought is too full of itself, in the immensity of its reality, to have the slightest idea of a lack of order or a lack of being ("Introduction, Part II", PM, 1304 / 62-3).

Such an unbounded will would lack any exteriority or, to speak with Fichte, it would lack an *Anstoß*. As Jankélevitch states, life could have been possible without matter or body but then there would be no *élan* and no evolution.[41] Matter thus calls forth the creative effort of life and it makes life focus itself.[42]

But, Jankélévitch notes, Bergson also affirms monism, and this question of monism and dualism, he writes, is one of the most complex of questions within Bergsonism.[43] Only life is real, and matter endures only because of its "solidarity" with life. As Canguilhem, who we will discuss in the next sub-section, says in a language strongly reminiscent of Fichte:

> The only positivity is that which can posit (*poser*), which means to create, and this is spirit. Matter is nothing but the fatigue (*défaillance*) of this creation.[44]

The two are not two opposing principles but two inverse *movement* or tendencies, and this is the second aspect that Jankélévitch mentioned. Matter and space do not exist as such; they only have their existence in duration or spirituality. There is, Jankélévitch writes, a monism of substance and a dualism of tendencies.[45] Yet, hardly having written this down, Jankélévitch seems immediately to contradict himself: the material tendency is an "anti-vital" tendency, that "goes against", "reverses", or "resists", the effort of

41 *Op. cit.,* 172.
42 Jankélévitch 1999, 171: *rétricer, préciser, canaliser.*
43 *Op. cit.,* 173
44 Canguilhem, 2007, 150.
45 Jankélévitch, 1999, 174.

consciousness, and this tendency *is* something.[46] To make matters even more confusing, although there is a monism of substance, both the vital and the anti-vital tendency must have the same dwelling (*foyer*): "because the tendencies only exist in a will in which they have their source."[47] If this is a monism, then how to explain the, at least *prima facie,* positive nature of the two tendencies? Jankélévitch concludes that there is a "transactional" solution, which Bergson was "only able to indicate", that shows life as always torn asunder (*dechirée*) and incessantly turning between (*tourbillonne sur place*) the two tendencies of life and death, good and evil.[48]

4.2 *Matter and Memory* and *Creative Evolution*

Georges Canguilhem, lecturing on Chapter III of *Creative Evolution* during the Second World War, discusses in more detail what such a transactional account might be.[49] The problem is made more difficult because we know that Bergson claimed to have written each book in forgetting the others. Canguilhem quotes from "Introduction: Part II", where Bergson writes that, because each problem demanded a unique effort, the theory of body and soul as presented in *Matter and Memory* could not have been extracted from the theory on the immediate data of consciousness, as equally the theory of evolution could not be extracted from that of body and soul.[50] Canguilhem concludes:

46 *Loc. cit.*
47 *Ibid*.
48 *Op. cit.,* 175.
49 Not long after this lecture, in 1943, the Gestapo occupies the university. Canguilhem quits his post and joins the maquis, the resistance movement in the south of France. See Giuseppe Bianco, “Présentation du "commentaire" de Georges Canguilhem,” *Annales bergsonienne* 3, no. Bergson et la science (2007), 100.
50 Canguilhem, 2007, 139. CM 1329-30 / 89-90.

> If, therefore, it is impossible to reduce the matter of *Creative Evolution* to the matter of *Matter and Memory* it is in the relation between matter and the evolution of life that we must search for its reason. In *Matter and Memory* it is the relation between the matter of the *individually* organised body and the *individual* consciousness that is studied. In *Creative Evolution* it is the relation between *cosmic* matter and *universal* consciousness in its organisational effort that is studied.[51]

The body was said to limit the totality of the soul, with a view towards action. In order to demonstrate this all Bergson needed was a body and its needs. To show the *unity* of body and soul Bergson then changed perspective. Duration and space were shown to allow for degrees of contraction and relaxation and this made it possible to solve the triple opposition of the extended and the unextended, of quantity and quality, and of necessity and freedom. These two accounts in *Matter and Memory* are not harmonious. On the first account the individual body must already be assumed as given. As we have seen, it is life itself that effects a primary discontinuity between itself and that which may serve to satisfy the organism. But *how and why* this happens was left unanswered. Why is there a centre of action, why does life display an essential lack? Nor did the second account help answer this question. Different degrees of contraction may be said to give us general conditions for individuation, but not specific, and certainly not *vital* conditions for individuation.

We have seen that this is what *Creative Evolution* set out to demonstrate. Different from *Matter and Memory*, Bergson no longer assumes the individually organised body but, as Canguilhem indicates, he asks after the relations between a *cosmic* materiality and the organisational efforts of *universal* consciousness. How and *why* does life organise itself into bodies? What is the relation between the individual

51 *Loc. cit.,* emp. added.

and the species, between the individual and society? How is materiality both an obstacle to be overcome and the essential embodiment for life?[52]

We start to see more clearly that the difference between the question of the *role and function* of the body and the question of the *unity* of body and soul consists of two different gnoseologies. The first gnoseology, "with a view to action", is a practical perspective, the other, we could say, a contemplative perspective. From a practical point of view body and soul serve different functions and consist of different realities. From a contemplative point of view body and soul express different degrees of one unifying principle of duration. The problem of interruption and inversion is not simply to reconcile the both unitary and oppositional aspects of life (one world but with real difference between the organised and the unorganised, the One and the Many, different multiplicities), but this also involves the reconcilation of two ways of understanding and interacting with the world (action and contemplation). The difference between *Matter and Memory* and *Creative Evolution* lies not between conflicting accounts of reality. Rather, the problem in *Creative Evolution* is how to unify two accounts of body and soul with two modes of understanding and interacting with the world, a dual account in fact already implicit to *Matter and Memory*.

Canguilhem seems to be aware of this when he analyses the different accounts of the relation of matter and spirit as found in *Matter and Memory* and *Creative Evolution* from two different perspectives, namely from the point of view of duration and from the point of view of "extension".[53] Canguilhem's analysis is very instructive in pointing

52 If time would have allowed I would have wanted to discuss in much greater detail how precisely Bergson understands individuation as I think that here a wealth of sources can be found to complement Fichte's philosophy, one that in many ways lacks a temporal and vital perspective. It is therefore unfortunate that this cannot be attempted here.

53 *Op. cit.* 139-50.

out the various qualities that pertain to matter and spirit, depending on the point of view that is taken. But the question of the unity and difference of the two perspectives themselves finds no real discussion.

Let us return to a passage from *Creative Evolution* quoted previously:

> Behind "spirituality" ... and "materiality" ... there are then two processes opposite in their direction, and we pass from the first to the second by way of inversion, or perhaps even by simple interruption, if it is true that inversion and interruption are two terms which in this case must be held to be synonymous, as we shall show at more length later on (EC 666 / 129).

Bergson wants to show how interruption and inversion mean the same thing. But then he adds a sentence I had previously not included:

> This presumption is confirmed when we consider things from the point of view of extension, and no longer from that of duration alone (*ibid.*).

The solution to the question of interruption and inversion lies in seeing reality, not from the perspective of duration *alone*, but *also* from the point of view of *extension*. It is not a case of showing that interruption itself means inversion, but that we may understand reality under two aspects, or that we interact with the world in two different ways, ways that correspond to two aspects of reality itself. On the one hand, there is the point of view of action ("extension") in which case matter and spirit are oppositional, and on the other hand there is the point of view of contemplation or intuition, in which case matter and spirit are two degrees of difference within one world of duration. It is when we consider reality from both points of view and when we contemplate the difference between action and contemplation that we may understand how interruption means

inversion. Although Jankélévitch and Canguilhem both intimated this "transactional" solution, they have not paid enough attention to the constant and subtle *movement between* the two perspectives that an understanding of life requires. As both Bergson and Fichte knew, the essence lies neither in a pure intuition, nor it conceptual explication but in a going backwards and forwards *between* them.[54]

5. Action and contemplation, interruption and inversion

In distinguishing between two aspects of reality and two modes of knowing and interacting with the world Bergson continues the transcendental project of understanding life. "We necessarily express ourselves by means of words and we usually think in terms of space" (DI, Introduction, 3 / xix). These were the very first lines that Bergson wrote. Although "thinking in space" is completely legitimate for the practical domain, when "the habits formed in action find their way up to the sphere of speculation, (...) they create factitious problems, [and so] metaphysics must begin by dispersing this artificial obscurity" (MM, Introduction, 168 / 16).[55] This oldest and most persistent of Bergsonian themes is an appropriation of the critical distinction between knowledge and philosophical reflection. Where knowledge concerns *that which we know*, philosophy after Kant asks, how is this knowledge possible? It asks after the conditions for the intelligibility of knowledge. This question cannot be asked by empirical knowledge itself as this would only result in a description, or enumeration, of various ideas, and not a thinking it through. It would not give us *a priori* conditions.

54 Compare the notion of *Schweben* the account given in IM 1419 / 37.

55 Please note the error in the English translation, which has "fictitious problems" for "*problèmes factices*" as F.C.T. Moore points out in his *Bergson: Thinking Backwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 21.

Bergson, writing at the start of the 20th Century, makes essentially the same point when he writes that we are doomed to repeat the contingencies of human culture and history if we do not reflect critically on how understanding has come about (EC, Introduction, 492 / xxxvii).

5.1 Philosophy and knowledge in *Creative Evolution*

Bergson states that the theory of knowledge and the theory of life must, "by a circular process, push each other on unceasingly" (*loc. cit.*). Hence the first chapter deconstructs the "ready-made garments" with which we usually approach the phenomenon of evolution (493 / xxxviii). The second chapter then tries to bring us back to the "generating cause" from which life and knowledge must be thought, which is duration (*loc. cit.*). The third chapter attempts, though as he notes "incompletely", to show how from this newly opened ground life and knowledge must be seen to originate (493-4 / xxxviii-xxxix). And the fourth chapter finally prepares for a philosophy that will transcend the self-imposed limitations of thought.

In all his works there are certain misunderstandings that Bergson never fails to criticise. All these misunderstandings in fact share the same root, which lies in not properly distinguishing between the practical perspective and the contemplative perspective. Thus arise the confused ideas of the primacy of the possible over the virtual, of the trajectory over movement, of disorder over order, the complex over the simple, of absence over presence, and of space over duration. They have the same origin, namely "that we import into speculation a procedure made for practice" (726 / 175). The difference between duration and space and the possible and the virtual we

have discussed in Chapter IV; that of the trajectory and movement in Chapter V. We will finish by discussing Bergson's critique of the ideas of disorder and nothingness.

Our perceptive and cognitive faculties are not given to us without purpose. In *Matter and Memory* we saw that perception really was part of our action on things. A substantial part of *Creative Evolution* is devoted to showing how our intellect cannot but reduce real becoming to stable states, movement to trajectories and the living to the inert. This is supported by a long analysis of the evolutionary significance of the purely human faculty of intellect in distinction from the animal faculty of instinct. This analysis, which we cannot discuss here, is heavily informed by biological, entomological and evolutionary research, on which Bergson spent a great number of years. It caused much intense debate and it is here that the charge of anti-intellectualism finds most of its material. The analysis provides essential empirical support for his thesis that the intellect is a faculty of action, it helps us survive and as long as it restricts itself to its task it may be said to "touch the absolute", i.e., be adequate to the object at hand. As a faculty of action it helps us at

> getting something we feel the want of, or at creating something that does not yet exist. In this very special sense, it fills a void, and goes from the empty to the full, from an absence to a presence, from the unreal to the real (*ibid.*).

As Bergson already stated in *Matter and Memory*, life proceeds from an essential lack. To live means trying to satisfy this lack. This then is the root of the practical perspective.

To understand how life and lack relate we must break away from the habits of practical thought in order to think anew.[56] To think against our habitual modes of thought requires effort, a violent effort even, one that cannot be sustained for long. We turn our thought inwards and observe our psychic life. We now experience interpenetrating states, what Bergson calls duration. This helps us understand that only duration is truly positive and the body merely a lower degree of it. This breaking away and turning back on to itself Bergson calls intuition. It is important to note that this intuition is not only an active coinciding with, or what Bergson calls sympathy, but it is also reflective.

What now happens when the categories of practical thought are transposed to the sphere of speculation? Practical thought is oriented towards the fulfilment of needs. Hence it starts from a perceived situation of lack and works towards the presence of the desired object. But when this schema of the primacy of lack is transposed on to the nature of reality itself, the question becomes: What was there before there was duration? What was there before life?[57] Why is there something rather than nothing? The perceived primacy of nothingness, disorder, the inert, and the immobile results from confusing a schema adequate to action with what is proper to contemplation. Although from a practical point of view we understand that first there is nothing before there can be something (it first needs to be created), all the analyses of conscious phenomena and life show the undeniable and irreducible positivity or spontaneity of these phenomena. But this precisely we cannot see from the practical perspective. Hence a (methodical) effort is required and a going against the normal habits of

56 The first development this idea is found in the article "Intellectual Effort", written in 1902. In ES.
57 Note the similarities with Fichte's question of the existence of the I before consciousness, see Ch. II, Sect. 2.4.

thought. If we do not keep the two well apart then we will surreptitiously be lead to assume that what is appropriate to practical thought is applicable to the speculative.

Whether we perceive disorder or whether we perceive "nothingness", what we are in fact confronted with is not so much the *absolute* absence of order, or an absolute absence of substance, but the *relative* absence of order and the relative absence of a substance. When, for example, I enter an untidy room, it is not the case that there is no order whatsoever, rather it is the absence of the kind of order I had hoped for, that I perceive (EC, 691-3 / 149-50). That the room is not in the order I had anticipated does not mean the absence of all order. All the objects have a perfectly good reason for being where they are. Rather than a total absence of order, it is the presence of a *kind* of order different than what I had expected. The same holds when we speak of the absence of something. The desired object is absent. Although practically speaking we may then say that there is nothing here for us, this does not mean that the absence itself is present. Rather, in its stead some other object is present. Bergson shows that the idea of nothingness is only thinkable when we transplant relative absence to absolute absence. We remove all items from the world and are then left with nothing. But this is a pseudo-idea. It is because we have separated (in thought) the object from an assumed homogeneous spatial grid (itself assumed to be perfectly empty *and* spatially extended) that we come to think that when a particular object is removed its spatial extension remains unfilled. Both the idea of nothing and that of the total absence of order result from confusing the practical and the speculative.[58]

58 Again, think of Kant's article on Negative Magnitudes, referred to previously.

Discussing essentially the same problem but from a different point of view, one that takes more account of Bergson's empirical interests, John Mullarkey in *Bergson and Philosophy* writes:

> When 'life' dissociates in its collision with matter, there is here a meeting between life in its virtual form (where matter and organic life are merely potential) with previously actualised forms of life.[59]

The collision of life and matter leads to the divergent forms of life. This, according to Mullarkey, must be understood as a collision of virtual and actual forms of life. But when the virtual and the actual are read in quasi-temporal fashion we are easily lead to a two-world theory of some hidden power beneath a reality that then is hard to see as anything but illusory. Hence from the very start of the thesis I have stated that the problem is to account for both sides equally. That the virtual-actual distinction can easily lead to an undesirable conclusion is testified by the terms used in the same page this passage is from. Mullarkey writes, there is the virtual, which is "merely potential", "ideal" or "theoretical", and "unrealised", which then, as a "condition of possibility" is "actualised".[60] They form "two phases in a continuous development, from the virtual to the actual."[61] Now, clearly Mullarkey is aware of the danger that Bergson might appear "as an idealist allowing only consciousness any reality, with matter becoming an epiphenomenon."[62] Hence a purely sequential or temporal view of the virtual-actual, or of interruption-inversion cannot be what is being advocated by Bergson.

The inadequacy of an ontological reading of the virtual Mullarkey makes more explicit in his more recent *Post-Continental Philosophy*. Indeed, it forms the main part of

59 J. Mullarkey *Bergson and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 82.
60 All from *op. cit.,* 82.
61 *Op. cit.,* 81.
62 *Op. cit.,* 80.

his critique of Deleuzian readings of Bergson. If we sidestep the question of whether Deleuze himself was committed to such a view, what Mullarkey makes clear is that if the "*actual*, new present [is seen] to be *ontologically* prefigured within the virtual, persisting past", this would be to make the actual "ontologically redundant".[63] Although Deleuze, according to Mullarkey, seems to understand the virtual-actual as an ontological distinction, this cannot but conflict with Deleuze's commitment to what Mullarkey calls a "superior, immanent empiricism".[64] Such an empiricism Mullarkey describes as concerning the following problem: "Experience, then, being immanent to itself and not an individualised subject, *is thereby transcendent*. One does not ask how the subject gains its experience but how experience gives us a subject."[65] As Mullarkey himself notes, this is a *transcendental* empiricism.[66] Indeed, if the thing to be explained is our *experience*, taken as something that we are immanent to, then the first question is *not* how the subject constitutes experience. This would not be *transcendental* idealism, but, to speak with Fichte, a *dogmatic* idealism. The question is, how does this give us a subject, *or rather: how does this give us a subject* always already *in relation to an object?* This is really the crux of the argument that with the help of Fichte and Bergson I have tried to make explicit.

In this thesis I have tried to account for the reciprocal nature of subject and object by stressing a reading of Bergson that sees the virtual-actual, or inversion-interruption as different ways of explaining our experience to us. We simply have *one* experience of *one* world. There is no veil to remove. But this experience breaks into a duality. This duality, we may say, is that of our relation to our bodies. On the one hand,

63 J. Mullarkey *Post-Continental Philosophy,* (London: Continuum, 2006), 27.
64 *Op. cit.,* 24.
65 *Op. cit.,* 14.
66 *Loc. cit.*

I *am* my body, I am all of it, not just the brain, but rather what I feel is coextensive with what I call my body. And yet, I am both more and less than my body. I am more than my body in that what happens to my loved ones, to my surrounding etc., all has a very real impact on me. And I am less than my body in I can loose a leg and still be me, hence I am not equivalent to the body-physical. Spirituality and materiality form a continuity, but on the other hand they are to be seen as opposites, as resisting each other. We need these distinctions in order to make sense of our experience and they cannot be reduced without paradox or absurdity to merely one of the two.

Mullarkey, in *Bergson and Philosophy*, proposes we introduce a distinction between the virtual and the actual to account for the "moment of unity and the moment of duality".[67] "In its actual form life and matter are external to each other", but in its virtual state, life and matter are tendencies within or internal to a virtual form of life.[68] This, in many ways, is perfectly consistent with my account. They are different forms of organisation; organisation being something of which Mullarkey writes that it is "a type of movement rich with history"[69]; organisation is temporal. The "ontological paradox" that this might lead to and that Mullarkey discusses,[70] I have tried in this thesis to untangle by emphasising the fact that, really, there is only *one* reality, but the various aspects of this reality are sometimes better accounted for within one perspective, and sometimes within the another. Mullarkey comes close to this view when in *Post-Continental Philosophy* he writes that we should see the virtual-actual, not as something "ontologically foundational", but rather as something "pragmatic and processual."[71] Hence he writes that we need to distinguish between different

67 Mullarkey, 1999, 80.
68 *Op. cit.,* 82 and 81 respectively.
69 *Op. cit.,* 64.
70 *Op. cit.,* 83.
71 Mullarkey, 2006, 31.

"perspectives", one "transcendental", and one "routine".[72] The reason that I too have been stressing different perspectives, rather than ontological categories, lies in that I see the different philosophies, sciences, and religions as all simply different ways of saying something about this one world we share. I do not believe in different ontological realms and I find that nothing is explained by any appeal to some hidden power beneath or behind within the world. I believe that there are only many different *ways of engaging* with the world. As becomes clear from his *Post-Continental Philosophy* Mullarkey too is not satisfied by an account of the virtual as some hidden force. To the extent that the virtual-actual is seen as different types of organisation, that, at the same time are different ways of understanding experience, I see Mullarkey's view as fully compatible with mine. Again, the problem, as I see it, is to try to make explicit the conditions under which both parties of the debate can come to some kind of agreement, even if only on forms of cooperation. And this is what I have tried to determine in this thesis.

In this thesis I have formulated the debate on different approaches as one between determinists and advocates of freedom. And as should be more or less clear by now, this not only concerns the different accounts as such, but also the consideration of what these accounts are supposed to be doing and what their strengths and shortcomings are. This in many ways is what I see as the motivation behind Kant's transcendental solution: to determine the proper domain of (at least seemingly) conflicting accounts. And I take Fichte to have stressed, and rightly so, the importance of more clearly demonstrating how we can go from one to the other and back again, without, however, ever conflating the two. This links up with what I take to be another

72 *Op. cit.,* 30.

important motivation behind Kant's Copernican Revolution. Namely that with all our attempts at explaining the world to ourselves we must accept that none of this takes us outside of the world to some noumenal realm. Rather, our method is immanent to the only perspective we have, which is our perspective. This does not conflict with allowing for a plurality of different perspectives, nor does this deny the possibility of our experience as something vastly richer than we can ever imagine. Duration is not some kind of special transcendent experience, but it may indeed be seen as a very valuable one. We are all within our own perspectives but this concerns one and the same world, and all we can do is reflect on this perspective using the tools and concepts at our disposal. But these perspectives are not some mere appearance caused by the emanation of certain transcendental conditions of experience. Again, these "conditions" are different ways in which we explain the world to ourselves. Hence the very idea of going behind these conditions is to not have accepted the main premise, namely that the world really is there and that really there is only one world available to us.

5.2 Action and contemplation

The influential Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar discusses the same disparity in Bergson's account. The different perspectives on life are that of a more action-oriented approach, and a more contemplative approach. Both have their relative merit, but both also easily lead to the two dangers of nihilism and alienation.

In an extraordinary six-page article "La philosophie de la vie chez Bergson et chez les allemands modern", written during the Second World War (!) for the eulogy after Bergson's death in 1941, he discusses the difficulty a philosophy of life has in

accounting for values and Spirit.[73] A philosophy of life, von Balthasar writes, must be at the same time both monist and dualist. It must be monist in that only Life can be its first principle; yet it must be dualist in relation to Value and Spirit. On the one hand Value and Spirit are seen by a philosophy of life as mere limits, as a mere alienation of life. Von Balthasar quotes Nietzsche to say: "There where life petrifies, the Law erects itself."[74] Values are secondary and parasitical and must be criticised from the point of view of Life, which alone holds truth. And so we have seen Bergson appealing on numerous occasions to the experience of duration as the only true arbiter.[75] Value and Spirit must subject themselves *to life* and not the other way around.

On the other hand, the "vital necessities" of Life reserve for themselves the right to reformulate a new "kingdom of values" that better express Life's values. Indeed, it is only in this way that a philosophy of life escapes its reduction to a form of "brutal amoralism", considering the circumstances in which it was written certainly not a empty comment.[76] Although Life is the only court of appeal, Life does not speak to us directly, but only ever *through us.* Because the only sense we can make of things is the sense that *we make*, we must express Life through Spirit and Value. It must be expressed through both Spirit and Value if we do not want our lives reduced to life's basest instincts. A philosophy of life is thus bound to a "hybrid couple" of Force and Value, Life and Spirit.[77] It is a hybrid couple because Value and Spirit are always secondary to Life, yet Life cannot do without Value and Spirit.

73 Hans Urs von Balthasar, "La philosophie de la vie chez Bergson et chez les allemands modernes," in *Henri Bergson. Essais et témoignages recueillis* (Neuchatel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1943), 264-270. It is the only entry by von Balthasar found in P.A.Y. Gunter, *Henri Bergson: A Bibliography* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Philosophy Documentation Center, 1986).
74 As quoted in *op. cit.,* 266.
75 *E.g.,* PM 1329-0 / 89-90
76 von Balthasar, *op. cit.*, 267.
77 *Op. cit.,* 268.

The ambiguous relation of Life and Value that one finds in the German philosophers of life, one also finds in Jewish philosopher Bergson, writes von Balthasar.[78] We find in Bergson two diametrically opposed systems.[79] The first one has as its centre the intensity of duration and creation. It is only at its periphery that we find matter. We may think here of the interruption thesis. The other, writes von Balthasar, is found in *Matter and Memory*, this sees the maximum of intensity in pure perception, in a plane of action purified of memory and with maximum detension in pure memory. As we have seen, pure memory and pure perception are brought to one single focal point in the present action. This present is what is most intense, whereas detension increases as we move up in memory, likened also by Bergson to the dream-state.[80]

When we approach the two systems from the side of the nature of action, the opposition becomes more clear, writes von Balthasar. The first system sees true authentic action residing in the effort of the creative mind. Here the practical is merely "an indirect and distant reflection" of it.[81] It is Life that is true reality and Form; Value and Matter are only derivative. These we have come to understand as so many relatively closed circuits of action-reaction, of habit and of the loss of interest. But in the second system it is practical life itself; it is the present that is itself the centre of action.[82] Both in the theory of pure perception, as in the continuity of duration in the second part of *Matter and Memory,* the present is *the* reality and this is a continuity and

78 Think here also of what Bergson wrote to the French Fichte expert Xavier Léon: "It are often our own ideas, systematised and pushed to their final consequences that we look for in Germany." See 'Bergson à X. Léon, 5 Dec. 1914 in Henri Bergson, *Correspondances,* 604. Please also note again the date of the exchange: December 5th, 1914, just months after the declaration of war between Germany and France.
79 von Balthasar, *op. cit.,* 268-70.
80 See e.g. the article "Dreams" from 1901, in ES.
81 von Balthasar, *op. cit.,* 269.
82 *Ibid*.

holism of action and reaction. Matter here is the effect of selection, of a cutting-up of continuity under the exigencies of need.

If we dig even deeper, we find that behind the two lie two forms of *ressentiment*: the action-as-effort of the first system displays a hostility against the "geometric rationality" that "empties" life of its intelligible and teleological structures.[83] The confusion of duration with space reduces life and creativity to mechanism and determinism. The second system, action-as-present-totality, displays a hostility against "pure spirit" that impedes the full immersion in the Whole of life and action. These two systems, writes von Balthasar, may finally be seen as the oppostion of mystic contemplation versus action.[84]

It then appears as though von Balthasar lines up these three distinctions in the following way:

From the point of view of **intensity** there is an opposition between:

- (**interruption:**) creative effort as the most intense; matter is a letting-go, an unmaking
- (**inversion:**) continuity of duration in the present is most intense; extensity and space are homogeneous and discrete

From the point of view of **action** there is an opposition between:

- the true action that is creative effort; the practical a **derivative** perspective
- practical reality itself that is true action; space a mere **abstraction**

83 *Ibid*.
84 *Op. cit.,* 270.

From the point of view of **resentment** there is a:

- (**contemplation**) hostility against geometric rationality that makes life **unintelligible**
- (**action**) hostility against pure spirit that impedes **immersion** in Life

Although there is much that is profound in what von Balthasar writes, and although I fully recognise the limitations on any article of this length, a feeling of confusion seems irrepressible when we line the three pairs up in this way.[85] From a practical or creative perspective matter is both an obstacle and the very material with which I work. Matter is assumed as that what is both given to and distinct from myself. The true creative effort is to make something new with the old. The practical and the habitual must be unmade for novelty to appear. This requires effort. But when I want to understand life, I see that life is spontaneous, continuous and wholly positive. The present is a continuity and it is from this perspective that I see that the divisions to which we cling are so many effects of the practical nature of life. Matter as ready-made and distinct is an effect, both of how I am inclined to see things and of the need for life to create habits for itself. True action is *here,* is *everything,* and it makes itself whether I actively take part in it or not.

But then von Balthasar seems to be saying that the second, speculative attitude, the one that sees the continuity of duration as true reality, is hostile against the pure spirit that impedes my *immersion* into the totality of Life, *and that this is the attitude of action.* The first one, the one I said was a practical and creative attitude, the effort *against* habit, would, on von Balthasar's account, be hostile against the confused

85 A confusion I will readily admit to be my own, rather than imputing it to von Balthasar when this will be shown.

geometric rationality that makes life *unintelligible*, and that this is the attitude of *contemplation.* Yet it seems to make little sense to say that the practical, creative attitude concerns contemplation and that the speculative concerns action.

Yet there is a sense to this. Although the speculative mind *sees* or understands the continuity and totality of life, is remains unable to immerse itself in life. Although intellectually it understands its embeddedness in life, it remains thoroughly detached from life; life considered as *action*. Hence the speculative mind is *alienated* from itself. The creative mind, on the contrary, sees or knows nothing of the continuity of all action, it only sees obstacles and habits. Yet, in unmaking what was made and making it into something new it is profoundly one with life. But creating does not mean taking part in Spirit and Value. When it does reflect on Life (which inevitably it must) it remains locked in the practical attitude. It attempts to raise itself to the speculative, but being unable to detach itself from the practical it is unable to unmix what is proper to the practical and what is proper to the contemplative. It ends up with a ratiocination of Life. In desiring to understand Life it raises the practical to the Ideal and hence comes to desire the Truth of Life as One, Immobile, Unchanging and Transparent. The practical attitude, now as a *form of understanding,* and aimed at Oneness with Life, desires the end of Life, the Nothing or nihilism.

Where the philosopher's mind, in contemplating life, is detached from the creative *élan* of life, it wants to *immerse* itself in life, because it feels alienated from creative life. It thus reacts against itself, against the "pure spirit" that impedes its own immersion. Being contemplation it *desires action*. The creative mind, being action but not yet Spirit, wants to *understand* Life, but finds itself unable to contemplate Life

without mixing in its practical attitude. It creates for itself the geometric rationality that reduces life to a Truth single and unchanging. Being essentially action, it desires contemplation and reacts against the pseudo-contemplation it has created for itself. Von Balthasar saw very clearly that this opposition of action and contemplation can never be solved in a "pure contemplation" alone.[86] Indeed as Bergson himself said: "One must act as a man of thought, and think like a man of action" (M, 1537).

6. Conclusion

The distinction between that which is proper to action and that which is proper to contemplation runs as a critical theme throughout Bergson's writings. For Bergson each has its own domain and when they are able to abide there they may be said to "touch the absolute". Problems start when what is useful to action is transposed into the domain of contemplation. It is here that philosophy must try to separate the two. What complicates matters is that the distinction between action and contemplation is unequal. Often it is said to be one between practical and theoretical knowledge, but this is in fact misleading.

If there is action on the one hand, and contemplation on the other, then knowledge lies somewhere in the middle. In a way Bergson does not really speak of knowledge but prefers to speak of the different faculties, such as perception, intuition or the intellect. Although qua process knowledge for Bergson would be a form of action rather than a form of representation, we may also speak in a more general sense of knowledge as an activity that is itself informed by action or past experience. The term

86 *Ibid*.

knowledge is equivocal for it refers to both some process but also to a certain set of data. This is reflected in the the two notions of knowing-how and knowing-that that we will now discuss

We often speak of *know-how* and *know-that*, and we assume that this neatly divides things in two. But knowing-how is not a kind of knowing that is of the same order as knowing-that. Knowing-how is as much a *doing* as it is a knowing. One of the things that is so very instructive about Bergson is that he makes it clear that doing, or action, is always already informed by experience. The here-and-now moment of action brings all my past experience into focus. This can take very elaborate and explicit forms but even the most rudimentary organism is able to temporally organise action. Habits are the very body of the organism and such habits can be combined with others to form new ones. Habits are not pure repetition but inherently adaptive. Similarly, knowing-that is always informed by action. Recognition is prompted by action. We select from a totality that which interests us. It is this that orients recognition.

But although both knowing-how and knowing-that are informed by action and memory and hence action and knowledge are part of one undivided process, we tend to separate knowing-doing into action and knowledge. From what is a single process of knowledge-action we separate knowledge from action and equate this with what are only its results: explicit and discrete knowledge. The action side of knowledge-action is generally not recognised as informed by knowledge and becomes mere action. Hence when we speak of know-how and know-that as forms of *knowledge* we loose sight of the fact that, from the point of view of such discrete and explicit knowledge, know-how is not really knowledge at all. Separated one from the other, know-how has no need for

concepts, just as know-that has no need for action. But practical and theoretical knowledge should not be seen as two forms of knowledge, with each its own domain, but as two tendencies of action and knowledge that exists within experience.

Where practical and theoretical knowledge are two ends of a single spectrum of knowledge-action, contemplation is yet another matter. Contemplation is an effort to detach oneself from the practical attitude of knowledge-action, to observe the process of knowledge-action, without falling into the habit of conceiving the process on the basis of its results. Contemplation, on this view, is not theoretical knowledge. Philosophy is not some meta-theoretical discourse but is something else.

When we model philosophy on the discursive, explicit knowledge that is found in the sciences we will be led to think that philosophy grounds our theories, the way that these theories are thought to ground the phenomena. But based on our reading of Fichte and Bergson this view should be rejected. Philosophical grounds are not scientific causes. Leaving aside the already in itself problematic notion of scientific causes, philosophy can only reflect, as it were, *from inside* our experience. Philosophy is concerned with experience, not phenomena, hence science and philosophy do not share the same model. As we have seen, philosophy, attempting to understand the whole, desires the immersion into the whole, whereas science, as form of action already being part of the whole, desires the intelligibility of the whole.

This conflict is not to be solved in pure contemplation alone. Bergson himself was later led to explore the lives of the Christian mystics to understand, and perhaps even experience, the unity of action-contemplation. In this thesis I have attempted to outline a philosophy of freedom. This, as we have seen, turned out to concern as much

the question of freedom as it did the question of philosophy. It had not been my intention to solve in any way the problem of action and contemplation, a problem that ultimately poses at an even higher level the question of the relation of philosophy *to life* and *to freedom*.

CONCLUSION: PHILOSOPHY AND LIFE

In this Conclusion we will discuss one last time the movement of thought that unites Fichte and Bergson. The movement is a meditation on what it means to take seriously life as a spontaneous and free event. We will situate this movement in its origin with Kant's transcendental philosophy. This, as we have seen, is as much a meditation on life as it is a meditation on philosophy; not simply a philosophy *of* life, but also the question of philosophy *and* life. Philosophy, as reflection immanent to thought, becomes an activity proper to life itself. But as reflection on life it cannot claim to represent life as it is in itself. It is then properly a part of life, yet always different from life. These two themes, the reflection on philosophy and its object, and an understanding of life as event of freedom, is what we will discuss to conclude this thesis.

1. Philosophical Intuition

1.1. Kant

Kant wanted to put an end to the debate that had been raging between two schools of thought. On the one side stood the dogmatists who claimed knowledge of the ultimate ground of reality. Opposed to them were the skeptics who denied that reality had to conform to the understanding. The dogmatists claimed true and necessary knowledge of the world, but, the skeptics rebuked, where is your proof? How can you demonstrate that these theories you propound are also true of this world? How are we to assume that the basic categories we apply to the world are in fact adequate to it? The world as such is unknowable and all we have are customary signs and habitual expressions.

Kant's solution is very subtle: he agrees with certain of the arguments from both parties; these, then, he uses against each opponents. But in the process the terms get redefined and take up a new meaning. He agrees with the skeptics that knowledge cannot be an immediate expression of reality. We are inseparably bound to the limitations of thought and any claim of knowledge outside of such limitations must be rejected. Hence the meta-physical aspirations of philosophy (at least insofar as these are uncritically assumed) will have to be abandoned. But although we are restricted to the limitations of the understanding, this does not mean we have to agree with the skeptics on a form of material idealism that claims an unknowable reality. Rather, it is *because* of the limitations of thought and the mediated access to reality that there is any possibility at all of ascertaining the reliability of knowledge.

Our knowledge of the world is both about this world and it is of our making. Our knowledge of the world is not an illusion (as though the world could be fundamentally

different), but neither is it an unmediated representation of the world as it is in itself (true and necessary knowledge of the ultimate reality). Hence he agrees with both, and disagrees with both, and in this way he thinks he has found a way to demonstrate the reliability of knowledge. He agrees with the skeptics that no unmediated knowledge of the world is possible. From the bottom all the way up, that is, from the syntheses of time and space to the Ideas of Reason, from experience to the unity of all thought, consciousness is always already actively engaged with the world. Because it is actively engaged with the world this world can no longer be thought to stand outside of any relation to me. Hence the skeptical concept of a thing in itself, can now be adequately explained. An object standing outside of any relation to consciousness is something that we can entertain as a mere thought (a negative noumenon), but it does not express any knowledge of the world (positive noumenon). No knowledge of an object standing outside of any relation to me can ever be expressed.

But this purely negative result contains a positive one. If our experience and our knowledge is always already of our making, then we are now in the position to liberate ourselves from the restraints of nature. If we are always already concerned with an experience that is of our making, then this means we are self-legislating. It is we who are responsible for our knowledge. Knowledge does not come to us in purely deterministic fashion, but is an act of spontaneity of consciousness. Against both dogmatists and skeptics Kant denies that knowledge is a mere imprint of reality, whether this be thought of as arising through a purely intellectual vision of reality (*intellectuelle Anschauung, Wesenschau*) or through the purely passive impression on the

empirical senses and their miraculous reproduction in consciousness (radical empiricism).

The understanding is a faculty of judgment and a faculty of rules, rules it imposes on itself (KrV A 126). What now needs to be done is to make these rules explicit so that we can all abide by them. We must investigate the conditions that make experience possible. This has become possible *because* experience is of our making. If we are able to explicate the rules for any possible human cognition then, as against the skeptics, such rules can no longer be said to be merely arbitrary. Although we may conjecture various non-human forms of cognition (the various problematic forms of intellectual intuition that Kant discusses) and thus say that our form of cognition is not the only one thinkable, and hence in a strictly theoretical sense our knowledge is contingent, because, however, *we* are not able to think in such a way the rules are not contingent but may truly be said to be necessary. There is only *one* kind of cognition possible for us, which is a limited, mediated and discrete kind of knowledge. Although explicit knowledge of the rules is not necessary for the actual performance of thought, such knowledge would finally allow us to differentiate between what may truly lay claim to sure and certain knowledge, or *Wissenschaft,* and what merely poses as knowledge, mere "enthusiasm" or *Schwärmerei* (KrV A xi-xii).

This story is well-known but still warrants repeating because it permanently changed the very nature of philosophy itself. It is not an exaggeration to say that the shock-waves it sent running through philosophy are still resounding today. Kant denies both philosophy as meta-physics and material idealism. There is no knowledge of reality as such, but this also means that the very idea of an ultimate reality must be

rejected. When Kant denied metaphysical access to the ultimate reality he effectively said: there is only one experience, *this one*. There is no other world beneath this one, a world of which the essential nature does not in any way corresponds to our knowledge of it. The skeptics, as material idealists, equally subscribe to a two-world theory: a world of knowledge or experience and a world as it truly is. But for Kant we only have *one* world and *one* knowledge, which means that my experience is inevitably going to be about *this* world. Hence knowledge of the world is *grosso modo* going to be a faithful or reliable depiction of the world. The precise content of knowledge remains contingent and open to change and improvement, but it no longer is contingent *vis à vis* some ultimate world or ultimate form of knowledge. But what does this mean for philosophy? Although the answer to this question is already contained within the above, it will be Fichte who will make it explicit.

1.2 Fichte

Kant restricted all knowledge-claims to include an empirical element (the pure receptivity of the senses). Empirical intuitions are subsumed under concepts through judgment. Such judgment is an act of rule-giving, a spontaneous act of self-legislation by consciousness. The manifold of empirical intuitions needs to be brought to synthesis and this, for Kant, entailed original or transcendental apperception. Such apperception, following Leibniz, he called “I”. Whether or not Kant was right to link self-legislation to self-consciousness is a matter that we will leave to the side. Fichte, under the influence of Reinhold, took up the question that Kant did not want to address (see KrV A xvii), namely, how are we to know of this I? As is well known Kant denies any knowledge of

this I. Insofar as knowledge has now been redefined as being composed of empirical intuitions and concepts, this was certainly consistent. Furthermore, the philosophical intuition of reality must be rejected if any knowledge is going to be claimed thereby (metaphysics / positive noumena). But what kind of knowledge *is it*? What is the status of the transcendental conditions claimed as possibility conditions for knowledge? This question concerns the very status of philosophical knowledge in the light of Kant's own Copernican Revolution.

Fichte, as again is well known, affirms a philosophical intuition of the I. But is Fichte affirming the same thing that Kant has just denied? As we have seen this is not the case. Fichte fully agrees with Kant that a philosophical vision of ultimate reality (i.e., knowledge of reality outside of any relation to me) must be vehemently denied. But if we want to explain the status of philosophy as newly defined by Kant it will not do to say that it too is restricted to include empirical intuitions under concepts. Be it for want of a better name, or to reconnect critical philosophy with the tradition of philosophy, Fichte appeals to intellectual or philosophical intuition. Although Fichte does not always clearly disambiguate between the attentiveness to the process of thought and the philosophical inquiry into the conditions of knowledge, he does explicitly deny that any of this pertains to something like a "I in itself". Such knowledge is intellectual or philosophical and not empirical because it pertains to the structures of knowledge itself and not to the empirical world. And such knowledge is intuitive, not in the limited sense of mere feeling, or a direct knowledge-as-vision of the world of Forms, but in the sense of not being mediated by, or dependent, on the empirical. Although the conditions of knowledge should not conflict with empirical knowledge and thus may be

said to find confirmation in empirical knowledge, it is not an empirical question of describing how people think ("psychologism"), or of enumerating all the claims to knowledge. The argument is not an empirical argument but rather a determination of how any such empirical concepts may first be understood to have come about. Knowledge of what we may call first principles is what was traditionally referred to as intuitive knowledge. Such knowledge is intuitive in the sense of being immediate in that it cannot be argued for from any higher perspective or principle. Whether these principles are thought to exist in some super-sensible world, or with Kant as immanent rules of thought, does not change the fact that they are cognised in something like philosophical intuition.

If philosophy can no longer claim access to another, more true reality, if there is really only one experience then philosophy can no longer claim a separate domain of knowledge. Knowledge is the product of the self-legislation of consciousness. Philosophy then, is concerned with an explication of the rule-giving process. Philosophy does not have its own object or domain in the world, rather, it is now the immanent reflection on the conditions of knowledge. Philosophy, as Fichte was wont to say, is a *Wissen vom Wissen*, knowledge of knowledge, or *Wissenschaftslehre*. Philosophy is the *Lehre* of *Wissenschaft*. Philosophy is concerned with an explication of the rules for sure and certain knowledge, knowledge as science, or *Wissenschaft*, which is the active process of creating (*schaffen*) knowledge. Philosophy aims to instruct people in the proper use of claims to knowledge, hence it is a *docta*, or a *Lehre*. Philosophy is an instruction in the active and spontaneous process of the creation of sure and certain knowledge. In a word, it is auto-didactic.

1.3 Bergson contra Kant

Bergson lectured on Fichte. But although there is evidence of a real engagement with Fichte, we may question the extent of its influence.[1] The academies of the younger days of Bergson lived and breathed strict neo-Kantianism. In this for-or-against-us world, Bergson chose against Kant. This engagement with Kant runs throughout his works.[2] But his many conflicts with Kant make little sense if we ignore Fichte's crucial modifications and reformulations of the critical project. It are these modifications of Kantianism that allow us to understand the kind of Kant Bergson responded to.[3]

In her *Bergson, adversaire de Kant* Madeleine Barthélemy-Madaule discusses in great detail both how Bergson understood Kant and the extent to which his criticisms were correct. She herself acknowledges that she agrees with Bergson's reading of Kant.[4] Unfortunately this is still by and large a Platonic reading of Kantianism.[5] In this thesis, and as I will discuss more explicitly below, I have tried to show how transcendental philosophy, properly understood, does not subscribe to a two-world theory. Rather, there is a difference of approach, or of interest; a difference between a reflective stance and a practical one, which should not be conflated with claims of different existing worlds (phenomenal world versus noumenal world). That Barthélemy-Madaule too understands Kant in Platonic fashion makes her discussion of Bergson's relation to Kant of limited value for our purposes. Although she is aware of the fact that "what Bergson

1 Viellard-Baron, 1997a, 96.
2 See Françoise Fabre Luce de Gruson "Bergson, lecteur de Kant." *Les Études Bergsoniennes* 5: 1960, 179n. We have discussed Bergson's relation to Kant in the following sections: Ch. IV: Sections: 4; 4.1; 5; 6; Ch. V: Sections: 1.1; 1.2; 2.1; 2.4; 3; 4; Ch. VI Sections 3.3; 4; 5.
3 See *op. cit.* Madeleine Barthélemy-Madaule remarks that we do not really know to what extent Bergson read Kant or the neo-Kantians such as Renouvier. See *idem. Bergson, adversaire de Kant* (Paris: P.U.F., 1966), 4.
4 *ibid.*
5 See e.g. explicitly on p. 99: "We are like prisoners in a cave subject to the evil of a perpetual indirect projection."

persecuted Kant for, was to not have been Bergson"[6] she does not see that Bergson fell prey to the retrospective illusion he himself often cautioned for. This is the case when Barthélemy-Madaule writes without further qualification that Bergson criticises Kant for not having performed a "genetic critique of science and reason.

We will discuss one last time how Bergson, in criticising Kant throughout almost all his works, fundamentally inscribes himself within a transcendental legacy. Bergson does not accept Kant's denial of any knowledge or experience of reality as it is in itself. He rejects the Kantian relativism of knowledge. He rejects Kant's denial of philosophical intuition. He does not accept that the immediate experience of the absolute is placed out of reach. Bergson is thus in direct confrontation with Kant. Or so it would seem. As we have, seen the ultimate ground of reality for Bergson is duration. Reality is of a temporal order and although the syntheses of knowledge are rooted in reality, we should not confuse the concepts that result from the process of knowledge with an understanding of the process of thought itself. For Bergson the Kantian relativity of knowledge only applies to experience under its utilitarian aspect. The Kantian structures are only so many habitual ways of interacting with the world, a world, furthermore, that lends itself to the *ready-made*. These structures are neither relative, as Bergson thinks he can show *contra* Kant, nor are we for ever bound *to them*. The relativity of knowledge is denied twice over. Reality itself is partly composed of a tendency towards thing-like beings, towards habits, towards individuation. Scientific knowledge "touches the absolute" because it arises in "dual genesis" with the very materiality of the world. Hence the adequacy of scientific knowledge is guaranteed. But crucially for Bergson this does not limit us to it. Because such knowledge is composed

6 *Op. cit.,* 4-5, see also 83, 84.

of only so many habits, because this is life oriented practically, a new effort of detachment becomes possible. If we detach ourselves from utility, from the practical orientation, we open up a new domain of immediate experience: duration.

It seems that Bergson completely overshoots his target. Bergson effectively seems to reintroduce the very two-world theory that Kant set out to destroy. The empirical knowledge that Kant tried to explain through an immanent critique, or a transcendental reflection, has now become a merely habit-lead, or pragmatic, understanding of the world. The transcendental condition of spontaneity, never intended by Kant to indicate another world or a separate domain of knowledge, has morphed into an understanding of reality as duration. Instead of the purely philosophical intuition of transcendental apperception we had with Kant and Fichte, we now have a real intuition of the intimacy of the profound life of the self understood as duration. Bergson is taking on a Kant that never existed.

2. The History of Philosophy

But just as we have to be careful not to read into the history of philosophy everything that took place since *(viz* 20th Century's critique of metaphysics), we should be attentive to the circumstances that surround Bergson. Bergson reacted to a different Kant then is around today. As we have seen, with Kant the philosophical project itself undergoes a dramatic change. If philosophy may no longer lay claim to eternal truth and instead becomes an immanent reflection on the status of knowledge, then this drastically changes the very idea of the *history* of philosophy. If philosophy is the

expression of eternal truths then its history would be irrelevant in the same way that the sciences consider their history to be irrelevant. If philosophy had its own domain, with its own object, then it should be possible to compare philosophical arguments in a somewhat objective manner. Bergson could be wrong, or Kant could be wrong, based on the merits of the argument alone. Hence this would obviate the need to take in to account *our* perspective, to be aware of the historical conditions that surround our interpretation. But if philosophy does not hold sway in a domain of eternal truths, but becomes an immanent reflection on knowledge, a knowledge, furthermore created in some sense by us, then this means that when we reflect on philosophy we inescapably reflect on it from the perspective immanent to the knowledge of the world we hold right now. Knowledge of the world is conditioned by the limits of the understanding, but knowledge of the limits of understanding is equally limited to the limits of our understanding of the world. That is, the empirical is conditioned by the transcendental, but because both are not carved in stone but are the result of self-legislation, our understanding of the conditions of knowledge is equally conditioned by knowledge itself, i.e., by our understanding of the world. Or, once again, philosophy tries to understand our experience of the world, but philosophy is not something outside of the world and hence it too is a reflection of, and not merely a reflection on, our experience. Fichte historicises Kant's account when he attempts to show the genesis of empirical knowledge from transcendental conditions. Hence knowledge now first has a history. Philosophy, as reflection immanent to knowledge becomes, as Fichte says, the pragmatic history of the human mind (GWL 222 / 198-9). And because philosophy does not have some meta-physical perspective it too becomes properly historical. The question then becomes: what sense are we to give to history?

Some would fear that the fact that philosophy has a history would be to condemn philosophy to mere historicism. What is the idea of history that they entertain? Are historical phenomena mere *facts?* Would the history of philosophy then be a mere *description* of a contingent sequence of historical arguments? No, the history of philosophy is not determined by its history, rather, as Philonenko writes, it is *philosophy* that drives the history of philosophy and not the other way around.[7] It is here that a Bergsonian understanding of history as duration becomes very pertinent. For Bergson time as duration is a continuous effort of integration and reintegration. Every moment takes up all of the past and as such rewrites this past. History, we know, refers to *histos*, less the telling of stories than a *weaving* of different threads into a coherent whole. This means that history is neither purely objective fact, nor something without interest to us today. History continues itself in the present and the present actualises the past. Terms, concepts and dichotomies are constantly being defined and redefined, and each time they take up their own proper histories. When we use these concepts we take on board their entire history. No one starts *tabula rasa*, no one has a private language, hence feigning ignorance of history does not amount to being free from history. The philosophy of today is the result of the history of philosophy and that is why it is so important to know this history.

But if this is what having a history means then we should pay special attention whenever we think and write about history. Whenever we look back on the past we almost inadvertently fall prey to what Bergson called the retroactivity of truth.[8] We select and interpret the past in light of the present. The past helps us understand our present and this actualises the past in the present. The illusion consists of reading into

7 Philonenko, 1990a, 26.
8 See Bergson "Introduction I. Retrograde Movement of the Growth of Truth", in PM.

the past things that only became clear in their subsequent development. This explains the sense of ambiguity when reading Fichte, due in large part to the development that took place since. The stormy debates in the 19th Century about will, drive, force, and unconscious activity find much of their root in Fichte's modification of transcendental philosophy. But this should not lead us to assume that a distinction that seems clear to us now was something that should have been clear to Fichte. This is not a shortcoming on his part but rather the effect the success of his philosophy. Without Fichte many of these links might never have been thematised.

If philosophy is a history of problems and a good and clear formulation of a problem half the way to its solution, then a clear formulation will result in the problems that are inevitably contained in that solution to become visible. The measure of a philosophy then should not merely lie in its capacity to deal with a given problem, but in the extent to which, given certain specific and historically determined sets of problems, it was able to develop this problem in a fruitful and productive direction. This also implies formulating a solution to the problem, but because the progress of time is an inescapable reality and, as Bergson stated, a complete knowledge could only be possible to the expense of a fully completed world, any solution is ultimately limited. Again then, the superior solution is one that fosters fruitful development of the problem itself. Although for us the way in which a certain philosophy may help us deal with a certain problem might be its more relevant sense, we will have to acknowledge the fact that certain philosophers developed a (historically) different set of issues in such a way as to even make thinkable the problem that we now put to them. If this problem first became thinkable with them then to demand of them to take this problem into

consideration is in fact to unconsciously pay tribute to the very success of their philosophy.

2.1 From Kant, via Fichte, to Bergson

If history is constantly being rewritten, and we do not want it to be written by the victors alone, then we should at the very least be attentive to our vantage-point. In the discussion of Fichte I have on occasion stressed the ambiguity found therein. From our point of view Fichte might be seen to have confused a merely philosophical consideration about what makes knowledge possible (intuition, concepts, apperception) with what makes up experience and reality as such (spontaneity of consciousness). But this a retroactive illusion. This illusion precisely became possible (i.e., thinkable) with the Fichtean reformulation of Kant's critical philosophy. Fichte's language of striving, will, force, activity andsoforth has had such an enormous and wide-ranging influence that we are in danger of almost failing to notice it. As I have stressed, so much happened in the 19th Century that when Bergson came to formulate his philosophy the world could now truly be understood as in a state of perpetual development. It is this development that in large part explains the misadequation of Bergson's encounter with Kant.

Kant had tried to make explicit the rules that govern our knowledge of the world. Abidance to these rules guaranteed the fidelity of knowledge. Who did not want to conform to the rules was a "fanatic" or *Schwärmer*. In his *Critique* Kant upholds a rather strict distinction between the content and rules of knowledge. Fichte famously tried to reformulate this rather external distinction into one that allows for degrees.

Empirical intuitions were not, and could not, be thought of as given to a purely passive sensibility, as this entailed a positive notion of a thing in itself. Hence such intuitions were now spoken of, as indeed consisting of the passivity of the I, but passivity now crucially understood as a *lower degree* of activity. Concepts likewise should not be understood as somehow being written in stone, but faithful to the spirit of Kant's notion of a faculty for rules, the concepts and categories had to be seen as *degrees* of judgment, i.e., degrees of activity. The concept "grasps" something, thereby determines something. Determination itself entails a determining aspect and a determinate aspect.

If we situate Fichte's "activising" reading of Kant in the subsequent current of 19th Century developments, as indicated in the *Intermezzo,* we may begin to understand why Bergson thought that Kant's empirical knowledge merely denoted a form of praxis, and that spontaneity of consciousness, understood as duration, describes the actual state of reality. For Fichte knowledge explicitly becomes a kind of activity. Man is self-legislating; he constructs and abides by his own rules. Hence something like pragmatism can now easily be situated within the history of transcendental philosophy. Although pragmatism only seems to take the epistemological aspect on board, its critique of Kant's universal and *a priori* rules, and its advocacy of historically contingent ones, is only first conceivable on the basis of Fichte's reformulation. The other aspect, reality as spontaneous process, can be seen as being taken up by, among others, evolutionism. If life is self-regulating then the organism both has to maintain certain conditions and it has to adapt to changes in its environment. Such insights will obviously only be reinforced by the study of gasses and fluids, the understanding of electricity, of atoms as field of force, all things that explicitly informed Bergson. What

for Kant and Fichte *could not* have been imagined as an accurate description of the state of the world, a century later could almost not be denied.

For Bergson, Kant had remained to close to a, now superseded, Newtonian picture of the world. Though this picture captures well our common sense beliefs about the world, it was beginning to conflict with a new understanding that had started to appear. This is the point Bergson attains in *Matter and Memory*: if we could show that Kant's strictures are habits rather than universal *a priori* rules and if we could show that they apply only to the pragmatic aspect of reality, and if, furthermore, we could show that this praxis is only *one* of *two* tendencies of reality (the other being of course duration), then such habitual knowledge would be neither relative, nor would all knowledge be confined to it.

What we see then is that when Kant rejects a two-world theory, and Bergson affirms the reality of *another kind of experience beneath* the commonly assumed one, this not a direct contradiction. Indeed, from the perspective of the history of philosophy that we will discuss presently, they are sequential to, and dependent on, each other. Kant's philosophy denied a Platonic two-world theory; he denied the distinction between a world of pure forms accessed by philosophy and an everyday world. Rather, philosophy aims to elucidate *this* world and our experience of this world. Kant stressed the fact that experience has a structure we can investigate. This effectively opened up a hermeneutic approach to experience. When subsequently the Newtonian picture of the world starts to crumble in the 19th Century Bergson's promotion of a kind of experience different from Newtonianism must be seen as having been prepared by Kant's Copernican Revolution. But even when Bergson claims access to another kind of

experience, it is only to the extent that he refrains from the vision of Platonic Forms that his philosophy is convincing. Indeed, this is the very point on which he criticised, incorrectly on my reading, Fichte, namely to have posited the absolute beneath being. The ambiguity that runs throughout Bergson's work on whether there are really two different levels of reality, duration and space, or whether this concerns one world I have shown to be inherent to, but not detrimental to, his philosophy. Indeed as similar point is made concerning Fichte. Fichte in fact explicitly stressed the inherent "incompleteness" of any philosophy (see the final section of Chapter II of this thesis). My proposition in all this is that, rather than attempting to show the superiority of only one side (Forms vs. perceived reality, Absolute vs. Becoming), we should attempt to make explicit how there are these different approaches to that one and only reality we all share, and that a first step to making this navigable, is to make clear what each side wants and what it can and cannot achieve.

If this shows how Bergson was still faithful to Kant when accusing Kant of having relativised knowledge, what about the two more tendentious claims of a two-aspect theory of the world and of philosophy as expression of the absolute? Partly these claims may be understood as motivated by a reaction against the quite literal interpretation that neo-Kantianism had to offer. By failing to interpret Kant as a historical-philosophical moment that requires constant interpretation, and instead presenting him as someone who brought the tables down from the mountain, a more radical move was now required. Against Spencerian deterministic evolutionism and a static Newtonianism defended by Kantianism (only finally abandoned thirty years after *Matter and Memory* through the experimental confirmation of the theory of relativity by

Eddington and Dyson in 1919) Bergson formulates an alternative philosophical account of reality that he names duration.

3. Freedom

In order to make sense of Bergson's claim that reality itself is bifurcated and that philosophy may express the absolute we should not only be attentive to the tumultuous developments of the 19th Century, but we would be well-advised to go back to the starting-point of this thesis, namely the idea of freedom as alternative to determinism. As we know, Kant, Fichte and Bergson all had their reasons for rejecting what in each case was a distinctive form of determinism. We have not discussed this at any length as it was the aim of this thesis to determine to what extent an alternative could be formulated that would be both superior to, and relatively independent of, determinism.

If determinism is unable to account for experience, combination, judgment, spontaneous generation or the evolution of life, what will happen if we simply assume these things to be true? What would we need to demonstrate if we wanted to turn the tables on determinism? This was the question with which we set out. First and foremost the intention was to outline the conditions such a philosophy of freedom would have to meet. Whether, with such conditions spelled-out, they could actually also be met, was not the principle aim of this thesis. Hence the argument may be said to work *towards* a philosophy of freedom, rather than claiming to have actually formulate one. Indeed, neither an inquiry into the attainability of such a philosophy, nor its further

development towards a positive account of what it means to live and act in freedom are to be counted among the explicit aims of this thesis.

The first condition we found was that, were a philosophy of freedom not to be accused of having merely *inverted* the opponents position, it would have to show that is was not a mere idealism, or later on with Bergson, a mere dynamism. It would have to be able to demonstrate that the phenomena to which determinism appeals (e.g., material necessity) are not mere manifestations, but attain a form of existence that is more *robust* than that of freedom within a system of determinism.[9] To demonstrate a more robust existence we would have to show that "the thing", or material reality, is a necessary condition for freedom. Only if we were able to show a form of persistence through time, some sense of the discreteness of bodies, and some notion of the continuity of action-reaction, not as mere manifestations, but as necessary conditions for spontaneous, creative life, could we claim superiority over determinism, as only then would we have shown *more* than determinism.

3.1 Spontaneity of experience

In its most abstract form, as found with Fichte, the stakes for a philosophy of freedom translate into the demonstration from the performative ground of the *Tathandlung* of the reciprocal determination, or co-genesis, of the subject and the object. One of the main advances of Fichte over Kant is to have made very explicit the fact that subject-consciousness only ever appears with object-consciousness. Although Kant distinguished between empirical self-consciousness and transcendental self-

9 We would have to show those for *at least the phenomena,* as clearly an account that would also include the metaphysics of determinism would not be possible as this metaphysics itself is antithetical to the philosophy of freedom.

consciousness, the different relations between empirical self-consciousness and object-consciousness and those between transcendental self-consciousness and the activity of determining an object had not been made explicit. For Kant empirical self-consciousness was related to inner sense and implied certain hard to account for empirical intuitions of the self. Transcendental self-consciousness, as synthetic unity of experience, was a necessary presupposition to understand experience, but, for Kant, it was also related to the possibility of ascribing representations to the self (the I think that has to be able to accompany..., etc.). This representationalism seemed to imply a notion of self-consciousness as immediate self-recognition. Although Kant appeals to an intuition of apperception at this point (§16 of the B deduction), he also has to deny such an intuition.

For Fichte empirical consciousness of self is, from the ground up, in reciprocal determination with a "not-I". The distinction is no longer between an already constituted subject and an opposite and external object, rather, it is a distinction between determining and determinate being, between an active pole and a passive pole. The distinction of I and not-I indicates the *direction* of determination and constitutes a mobile *horizon* between what is determining and what being determined. My sense of self is two-fold: The more I determine the not-I, the more the I may be said to grow, hence knowledge of my (empirical) self is a process (knowledge of the world ultimately being knowledge of self). Furthermore, and as a result of this, the "not-I" can now be as much "within" me as "without", in that the not-I is understood as the passive pole and not on a spatial schema of interiority-exteriority. |Hence it may include my body and the unconscious. Indeed, unconscious mental activity first becomes thinkable

with Fichte. Empirical knowledge, or awareness of self, is thus in reciprocal determination with what is not-self. Hence Fichte has no need to appeal to some privileged rational psychology that has miraculous non-empirical intuitions of the empirical self.

The second sense of self (the transcendental self) also relates to the determination of objects. Kant considered non-empirical consciousness of the transcendental I an absurdity. Now, in a way, Fichte does not disagree. If the transcendental I is the *act* of determining an object then it is only *with, in,* or contemporaneous *to*, the empirical, actual, act of determining an object that I may become aware of the act of determination, that is, of the transcendental I. Hence transcendental self-consciousness is related to the actual occurrence of the act of determining an object, hence it requires such an object. Pure apperception is not a representational recognition of myself as identical with myself; it entails no comparison, but an awareness of, or reflection on, what I do all the time. Thought can take itself as object, precisely because it is not an object, but the activity of determination. Determination does not come about mechanically but must be understood as occurring spontaneously and for Fichte this meant it is conscious *immediately*. Such immediate consciousness can become explicit self-consciousness (recognition of oneself as the subject of thought) when it turns its activity on itself to determine what this activity is. This, however, is not a constitutive act, just as philosophy does not constitute knowledge (true foundation) but a reflection on knowledge, something that is immanent and ongoing. Self-consciousness then does not entail some privileged intimacy with an interior quasi-object named "self", but merely a

more explicit form of consciousness that is spontaneous and self-grounding. Again, it is only ever with a world-to-be-determined that the activity of determination is called forth and the possibility of explicit self-consciousness appears.

From within empirical knowledge, of which we now know that it is the only possible one, I find myself confronted with a not-I, with something different from me that resists my determinations and is thus independent of me. But in order to account for this experience of being impressed by a not-I (my receptivity or passivity) I come to realise that this not-I, *to the extent that I have an experience of it*, must be posited by me (by my activity), in what Bergson would later show to consist of a selection from a totality of things that impress me (*Eindruck*). This not-I I make into a representation, which means that I bring it under concepts; I determine it and limit it. At the same time I determine myself as being different from this not-I, that is, a primary division between I and not-I is erected. In order to understand the mere oppositionality of an I and a not-I the act of determination must be presupposed as occuring spontaneously. In this way we are able to understand our interaction with the world. But the empirical perspective is also a practical one where I act on things, and things act on me. Here I know that there really are things that are different from me, I really do experience a world and a body. This difference between me and the world occasions my determination of the world. Hence although self-positing, as spontaneous or absolute act, cannot be reduced to the mere interaction of things, since such things are only ever to be understood to result from determination, the activity of the self is called-forth by the passivity of the thing. Theoretically I can explain *how*, but it is only practically that I know *why*.

3.2 Duration

Bergson, we have seen, starts off differently, but soon encounters a similar problem. From the philosophical perspective of "pure intuition" materiality is merely a lower degree of the continuous organisational effort that is duration. This allows us to understand general conditions of individuation, but not *vital* ones. Although the account from *Matter and Memory* goes far in showing *how* individuation must be understood, it lacks an account of *why* duration would become embodied. As I have said, it is the difference between a living and a dead organism that shows that there is a real difference between the material and the spiritual.

In fact, there are two separate problems, or philosophical positions, that Bergson needs to avoid. The first one is dynamism or Heracliteanism.[10] This problem is very much akin to Fichte's problem as it has been discussed in this thesis. If we start with a non-mechanistic, non-deterministic principle, with a dynamic or spontaneous principle, we will need to give an account of the relative persistence, discreteness and impermeability of bodies. This is not only because we seem to be presented with such objects all the time, the fact, that is, that we seem thoroughly unable to even *perceive becoming* or constant change ,and so whether this be illusion or not, philosophy will have to give an account of this. But also because our knowledge-apparatus, being what it is, seems thoroughly incapable of *even making sense* of the world if there is not some relative stability and some relative identity to which our words and concepts attach. Not only is to perceive to immobilise, but to know is to render like with like. Although we might intuitively become aware of the constant change that is reality, we seem to be unable to give an account that is adequate.

10 See the Introduction, Sect. 7

Jacques Maritain, despite the radically different nature of his own neo-Thomist project, does make this point very clear. It does not help to jettison the intellect in favour of some other, non-intellectual faculty of intuition, a faculty, furthermore, of knowledge. Yes, the intellect is limited, but to the extent that we want to express things about the world, there really is no other. Intuition-as-philosophy is better kept within a single faculty of knowledge, provided we do not reduce the intellect to the mechanistic, reductionist intellect of the sciences.[11]

However, concerning the first of the two points, the relative permanence of bodies, Bergson, to my mind at least, was right to claim that duration, far from eliminating substance, has facilitated our understanding of it. A mechanistic-deterministic account of matter is unable to give an adequate account of persistence through time because it always reduces time to space. Duration lets us understand matter as a constant integrative effort, different only in tending towards a relative closure of action-reaction, towards a relative repetition and towards being relatively local, rather than global. Without such an account we would have matter constantly falling apart and starting over again, we would not be able to understand how movement continues itself through time.

The second problem, as we saw from his lectures on Fichte, is Alexandrinism. This too is two-fold. Alexandrinism, in positing some abstract philosophical principle beneath or above reality, is not only less original, but has very limited explanatory power. If all life were merely durational, or merely spontaneous, and beings or bodies mere manifestations, then our principle would be both transcendent and non-specific. The less we are able to show why there is an intrinsic necessity for embodiment, the

11 See Maritain "Preface to the Second Edition" (1932) in Maritain 2007, 29.

less strong our position is *vis à vis* determinism. A transcendent principle would merely have succeeded in inverting determinism as a form of dynamism. But also and separately, the less we are able to show how this principle itself can only be thought as embodied, the less informative and precise our philosophy will be.

4. Fichte and Bergson

Creative Evolution aside, the only other time that Bergson mentions Fichte explicitly is in "Introduction II: Stating the Problem" from 1922.[12] Again it is in the context of a reflection on method. Taking up the opening lines of his *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, he writes that intuition, as search for the absolute, has always meant a search for the eternal. But this eternal principle is purely an abstract and intellectual principle (PM 1271-2 / 30-1). As an intellectual principle it has merely condensed all its intellectual, which means *practical*, assumptions and attitudes into a single and uniform principle. Philosophy then only needs to unwind this principle to return to our habitual, not critically investigated, assumptions. Such a principle is merely the concept of concepts, a concept so general it would not matter whether there be plants, animals and man. Here the I would only amount to mere indexicality and in no sense would it be embodied. Such a philosophy would not be very original.

When one reads Fichte it is not hard to see how one could come to this judgment. Fichte's explicit ambition was to provide a genetic account of the categories of thought as presented by Kant. Hence quality and quantity, limitation, relation, all

12 Published in 1934 in PM. This coincides with the publication in 1922 of Xavier Léon's *Fichte et son temps*, a work that undoubtedly must have reached Bergson.

these terms from the table of categories appear at one point or another in his deduction from first principles. Fichte's abstract philosophy seems to hold equally well for a world without plants and animals. But although this is a limitation of his philosophy, it does not constitute a critique. It is not a critique because the point could only have been made after Fichte's rethinking of Kant's philosophy. It is a retro-active illusion on Bergson's part to demand such an effort from Fichte. Fichte gave an account of the necessary interrelation of the "absolute principle" of self-positing on the one hand, and reciprocal determination of the I and not-I on the other. A vital, durational and evolutionary account of embodiment first became possible on the basis of this genetic account. If Bergson is able to give a much more nuanced account of embodiment, Fichte still remains highly instructive for having rigorously thought through the philosophical stakes of this project.

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Abstract

The thesis asks the following question: If determinism cannot give an adequate account of freedom, but conversely, an appeal to freedom as such is unacceptable to determinism, how to formulate an alternative philosophy that would be acceptable to both? What are the conditions such an alternative would have to meet? It is within this overall problematic that we situate the though of Fichte and Bergson.

A first step to the solution Fichte finds in Kant's appeal to a original and synthetic act of consciousness, something said to be a necessary transcendental condition of experience. We situate this appeal to something both original and synthetic as motivated by the perceived failure of a radically reductivist empiricist project (i.e., determinism). But Kant was criticised for not having supplied a proof for such a principle. Fichte takes up this challenge but not in the way his project has ordinarily been understood. Fichte tries to show that a foundational synthetic act can only ever be adequately understood when taking the form of an *opposition* of I and not-I. The I and not-I are co-genetic in that they must be seen to stand in a relation of reciprocal determination. We are then able to demonstrate that the three principles of the *Foundations* (self-positing, opposition and reciprocal determination) are *simultaneous* and not successive.

For all their differences and for all his critique of Kant, Bergson is confronted with a similarly structured problem. Departing from an experience that is said to be continuous (duration), how now to account for the very real difference of the organised and the unorganised? Bergson will have to show that, although life/experience is continuous progress, this can only take the form of an opposition of "that which is making" and "that which is already made", between habit and effort.

Fichte and Bergson may be discussed in one thesis because both give a very sustained account of how to think relationally. They prioritise the question of the *Verhältnis* (dynamic relation, reciprocity) of subject and object as something that precedes the question of the *Beziehung* (directed relation, intentionality) of subject and object. The second question already assumes subject and object and is therefore dependent on the first. For Fichte and Bergson to understand subject and object means to understand them as different activities, different temporalities, different forms of organisation, as parts of a relation. Such a relational thought is what ultimately allows us to mediate the conflict of determinism and freedom.